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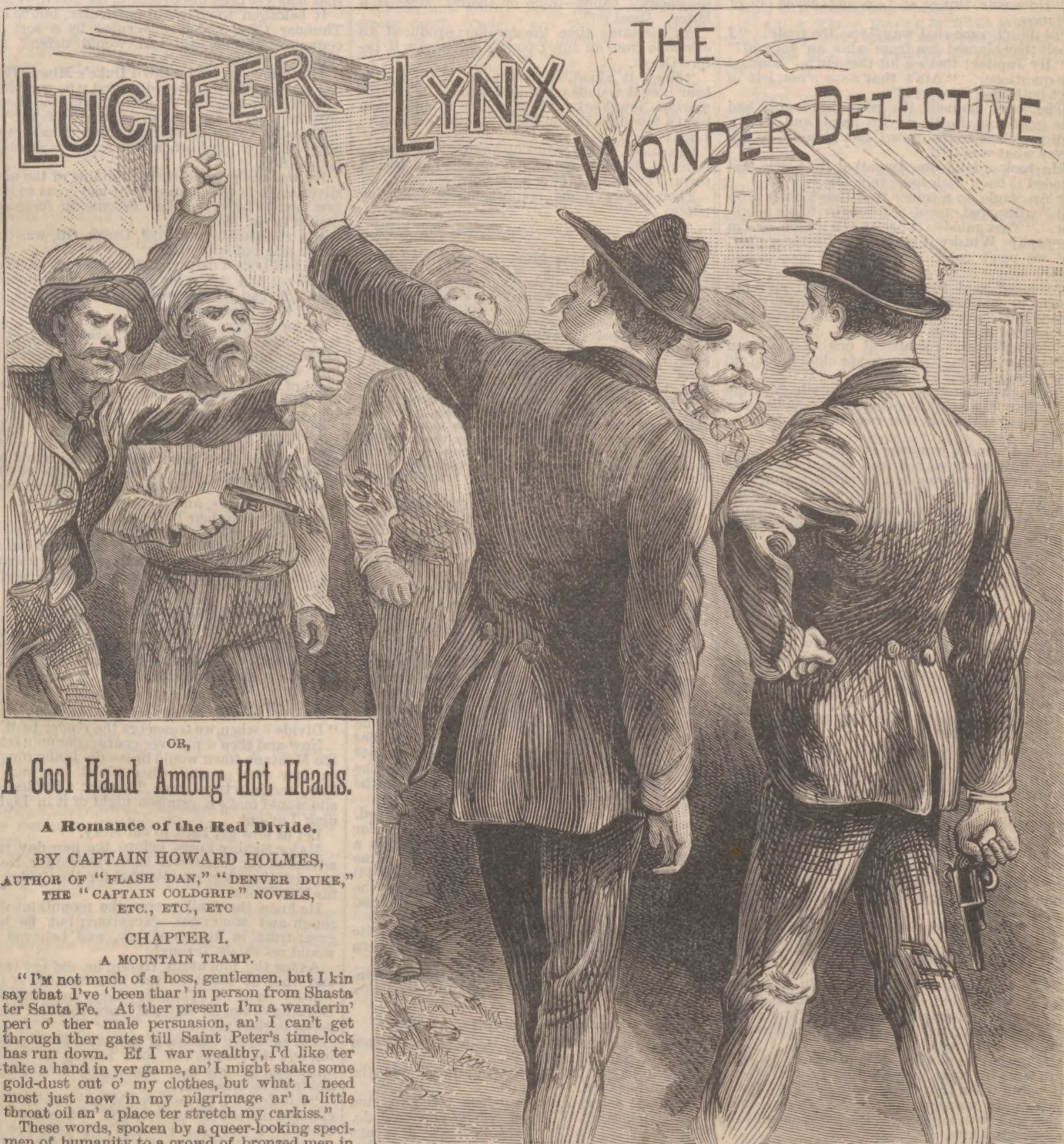
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OR, A Cool Hand Among Hot Heads.

A Romance of the Red Divide.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "FLASH DAN," "DENVER DUKE,"
THE "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP" NOVELS,
ETC., ETC., ETC

CHAPTER I.

A MOUNTAIN TRAMP.

"I'm not much of a hoss, gentlemen, but I kin say that I've 'been thar' in person from Shasta ter Santa Fe. At ther present I'm a wanderin' peri o' ther male persuasion, an' I can't get through ther gates till Saint Peter's time-lock has run down. Ef I war wealthy, I'd like ter take a hand in yer game, an' I might shake some gold-dust out o' my clothes, but what I need most just now in my pilgrimage ar' a little throat oil an' a place ter stretch my carkiss."

These words, spoken by a queer-looking specimen of humanity to a crowd of bronzed men in a large cabin caused more than one smile.

It was on the "Red Divide," a well-known

LUCIFER LYNX STOOD ERECT ALONGSIDE THE YOUNG DUELIST, AND LOOKED INTO THE FACES OF THE FIERCE CROWD.

place in the mountains that separate Idaho and Montana.

The particular place was Thunder City, on the Idaho side, and not far from its pugnacious Montana rival, Lightning Lay-out.

The time was about ten o'clock of a cool night in the late autumn, and the occupants of the cabin, ten in number, were playing cards for each other's gold.

The stranger had come unannounced.

He had strode boldly up to the open door, and the first intimation the gambling party had of his presence was his nasal "Hello! gents," which instantly commanded attention.

Rather tall, but with a well-rounded figure that seemed to belie his statement that he was a wanderer, the stranger was in this respect attractive.

He had dark-brown eyes, hair of like color, and his face wore a bristly beard of a few days' growth.

He might have added to his personal remarks that he was no dude, for his clothes were of many colors.

On one foot he wore a boot into which he had rammed one pantaloone leg without ceremony, and on the other a shoe that did not seem to afford him much comfort.

His hat was a slouched sombrero, whose claims to better days consisted of a fragment of silver band lengthened by means of a rattle-snake's skin.

When he had finished the remarks that open this chapter, he leaned against the cabin wall and fixed his eyes on a bottle that stood on the rough card table.

"How war things at Lay-out?" asked one of the men.

"I didn't come that way," was the reply. "I smelt ther blamed den from afar an' kept off!"

"By Jupiter! thet's a hit thet hurts!" laughed the questioner. "Ain't thar some p'isen left in thet bottle for ther peri?"

The next moment the mountain tramp had the suspicious bottle in his hands and with a ludicrous bow to the crowd, he proceeded to discover what was in it.

He took a long, steady pull at the bottle and handed it back with some reluctance.

"An eagle to a shiner thet thar's not a drop left," whispered one of the toughs to his neighbor. "Thet galoot's capacity is a gallon, or I'm a seraph! Whisky is whisky in Thunder City, an' we can't cater ter a walkin' sponge like thet."

"Gents," said the stranger, as his eyes appeared to snap under the influence of the drink just taken, "my cognomen in full is Jeroboam Robustus Butterball."

"Jewhillikins!" ejaculated one of the men. "It's ther name thet wore yer clothes out, an' not yer anatomy."

"It's ther name my saintly parents gave me an' I wear it with pride, though it's pulled me back many a time on ther road o' life," was the reply.

"It's a wonder you ever got this far."

Mr. Butterball sighed and passed one of his hands across his brow in a reflective manner.

"I've tried ter shorten my name so as ter save jaw, an' now I'm ginerally called 'Boam, which I think is nearly as sweet as the sound ov fallin' waters," he said.

"It reminds me ov a cascade's base," laughed a bronzed gambler, who seemed to have grown tired of the tramp's talk. "Wal, Mr. 'Boam, thar's a blanket in yon corner, an' it'll prove long enough for yer carkiss if you don't stretch too much."

The mountain tramp was not slow to see the hint implied in the man's words, and with the remark that he believed he needed rest, he sought the blanket cot and stretched himself upon it.

Nobody seemed to take any notice of the stranger after that.

The game, slightly disturbed by his arrival, was resumed with the fervor known to camp games of the sort, and Jeroboam Butterball, peri or tramp, was left entirely to himself.

In a little while, some heavy breathing in his corner told the mountain gamblers that he was asleep, and he was allowed to enjoy his nap without disturbance.

The game went on until the stars that shone above the "Divide" denoted midnight, when, by common consent, it broke up, and the men prepared to disperse.

Among them was a more than ordinary looking person—a large man with a heavy mustache, shaggy eyebrows, and about fifty years of age.

He was the best dressed person in the cabin, and his heavy gold chain and medallion charm proclaimed a mountain nabob, if nothing else.

This man lingered behind when the others began to withdraw.

He dusted his clothes with his hands as if to gain time for some purpose, and he was still in the cabin when the other gamblers had left.

The next moment one of the players came back, and with a glance at the big man shut the door behind him.

"By Jupiter! Ozark, I thought the game would never end!" ejaculated the Nabob. "I lost my pile as soon as possible, just to end it,

but I'll more than get even by an' by. What about the peri thar?"

The speaker glanced at 'Boam Butterball as he spoke, and the fellow called Ozark stepped noiselessly across the cabin planks.

"He sleeps like a winter b'ar," said Ozark under his breath, and then he stooped over the mountain tramp and looked steadily into his placid face.

The big man waited impatiently for the verdict.

"Make sure o' him, Ozark," he whispered. "We don't want any listeners hyer now."

Ozark touched the tramp lightly at first, and then shook him gently.

The response was a grunt and a slight movement of the tramp's limbs.

"I don't think he'd hear it thunder!" laughed Ozark, as he came back to his companion who had seated himself at the deserted table. "That galoot is just what he looks—a mountain nuisance, an' as harmless as a kitten."

"That is all right," smiled the big man. "I only wanted to be sure of him, you know. Anaconda gave him the use of the corner he occupies, an' I don't want to shake him up without cause."

"Oh! he's safe, major. He's as good as a board in ther corner thar. Now let's get down to business."

For a moment silence reigned between the two men and then the big one laid one of his hands on the table.

"By the hand before you, Ozark, I've got ter get thar inside o' a month!" he said. "The time hes come for ther whole game to play into somebody's hands—mine or theirs! Here is a letter. Read it!"

At the same time the speaker produced an envelope from an inner pocket and threw it before Ozark.

"Read it aloud," he went on. "I want to hear how it sounds on your tongue. It is post-marked New York, as you see, an' it must have been a few days in the Helena post-office before I got it."

Ozark Oll, as his entire nickname was, hastily relieved the envelope of its contents and leaned toward the lamp between the pair.

Then he began and read aloud the following letter:

"NEW YORK, Nov. 9, 188—.

"MAJOR SPHINX:—

"They say they have found the right trail, but I don't believe a word of it. You don't want to make any mistake now, but when you strike you want to hit the bull's-eye! They hired a new detective some time ago, but one night, *some how or other*, he fell into the river, and since tuen has furnished no report! If he ever reports it will be after Gabriel blows his trumpet! We are all serene here, but almighty impatient, and the treasury is rather low. You don't want to lose your wits now. The game is to be played out on the 'Red Divide' and both Thunder City and Lightning Lay-out will take a hand in it, I expect. The *right person* is somewhere near you. He is worth to the right individuals more than a million in coin. If you want me on the 'Divide,' telegraph. I'm a bad man from Sunup, and I know the Rockies as I know the dens of Gotham. Keep a cool head, major. Be sure of every man you trust. We must be millionaires or beggars."

"JULIAN, 'THE SPIDER.'"

The big man leaned across the table and listened to the reader with glistening eyes. He drank in every word and seemed to follow the reader with bated breath.

"That's a letter an' a half, eh, Ozark?" he exclaimed when the dark-faced man had pronounced the strange signature at the bottom. "You don't know the Spider, hey?"

"No," answered Ozark.

"Then you've missed knowin' the coolest head between human shoulders. He is my pard by the sea, you my stand-by in the mountains. The Spider is larger than you be, Ozark, quick as a cat, and merciless. Major Sphinx he calls me, ha, ha! That means mystery, eh? Well, I'm a livin' mystery, by the giant spoon!" and Major Sphinx thrust his thumbs into the arm-holes of his vest, and leaned back in the chair and laughed.

"See here, Ozark!" he suddenly exclaimed.

"The Spider says he will come if I send for him. By Jove! I b'lieve I'll do it. What a dashin' team you two 'll make in the game we've got ter play for the gold stakes. I'll write out a dispatch for the Spider—on the back o' his letter. Of course it'll go ter a name. You'll take it ter Helena, Ozark?"

The tough bowed and saw the major write on the back of the letter that had just been read.

"Thar it is, Ozark!" he cried, pushing the intended dispatch across the table. "I have only written:

"Work is plenty here. I can give you a job."

He will understand that. Can this telegram start for Helena to-night?"

"It'll be off in twenty minutes," was the prompt response.

"Good! Jehu! I want to see you two men work together. I know what you can do. Ozark an' the Spider!—east an' west. It means success!—it opens the gates ov the biggest bonanza out o' doors!"

Ozark picked up the telegram with a smile

and saw that Major Sphinx had written an address near the foot of the paper:

"RICHARD RAGAN, JR.,

"No. — Sixth Avenue, N. Y."

In a moment the paper had been transferred to Ozark's pocket and he was on his feet.

"With the Spider here, and with one o' his peculiar nets well spun, I'll be the Nabob o' the Red Divide!" exclaimed the major.

At that moment the mountain tramp in the corner moved, and his lips said almost audibly: "Jewhillikins! what a lie!"

CHAPTER II.

OLD "BY JOVE! HA, HA!"

THE next morning it was discovered that 'Boam Butterball, the mountain tramp, was not in the corner, and Anaconda Alf, the owner of the cabin, said, when questioned, that the non-descript must have stolen away before dawn.

At any rate, nobody in particular seemed to take more than a passing interest in him, and the majority of the Thunder City toughs had already forgotten his ludicrous name.

Thunder City, as has been mentioned, was on the Idaho side of the mountains.

It consisted of a few stout cabins, huddled together without any arrangements of streets. Each man had put up his cabin where he pleased, and when the whole thing was done somebody christened the collection Thunder City, for want of a more euphonious name.

Almost within the limits of the city was the mouth of one of the most wonderful silver mines that had yet been discovered in the Northwest.

It belonged to no one in particular, but to all Thunder City, which was ruled by a sort of communism, that held and would defend all things in common.

This mine was called Devil Duke's Mine, after the person who discovered it, and who was shot by a brother tough in a row in Lightning Lay-out, the rival town just beyond the "Divide."

Thunder City's most important citizen was Major Sphinx, with whom the reader is already acquainted.

He was not present at the founding of the new silver town in the Rockies, but had come to it a few months later, and had become the foremost person in the place.

His companion and tool, Ozark Oll, was one of the original inhabitants.

He had been a desperado in numerous parts of the West, and it was his boast when in liquor, that if he had all the rewards offered for him, he would be a bonanza prince.

Major Sphinx, somewhat of a human mystery himself, for the men of Thunder City knew nothing of his past career, drew Ozark to him without difficulty. There seemed to be a bond of union between the two, although Ozark Oll declared he had not known the major previous to his arrival on the "Divide."

The hatred that existed between the valir camps was bitter, and in the course of a few months after their establishment the ground between them had well earned the title of the "Red Divide." More than one mountain duel had been fought, and a dozen men had died in the passes with their boots on.

So great was the antagonism, that midway between the two camps was a broad board nailed to a tree with a black hand pointing toward Lightning Lay-out, and under it the inscription:

"Lightning Lay-out is a nest of liars!"

And not to be outdone by Thunder City, some irate denizen of the slandered camp had added to the board a hand pointing toward Thunder with these words underneath:

"Thunder City, ditto!"

This is the state of affairs that existed on the "Divide" when we transport the reader to it.

Now and then some over-courageous man from the Montana town would brave the Idaho roughs on their own ground, when blood was sure to flow, and in return some Thunder City desperado would make a crimson night of it in Lightning Lay-out.

Let us now get back to our story.

Major Sphinx knew before the new day had advanced far that Ozark had departed for Helena with the telegram intended for the Spider in far New York.

He knew the trail across the mountains was rough and somewhat dangerous; but he had great trust in his messenger, and believed he would get safely through.

As for the mountain tramp, he did not care, and while he stood at the little counter of the whisky shop of Thunder City, enjoying his morning dram, he did not once think of Jeroboam Butterball.

The promised success of the game he was playing and the prospect of soon having the Spider with him, quickly took the tramp from Major Sphinx's recollection.

"I believe I'll go and see Flavia," suddenly exclaimed the major to himself. "Somehow-or-other, if I can discover the real relations between the pair, I may play the game out a little sooner than otherwise. The girl is up. She's one of those early birds, by Jove! ha, ha!" and

the Thunder City Nabob fortified himself with another drink of mountain whisky.

Not long afterward he found himself before the door of the neatest cabin in the camp, and, in response to his knock, a beautiful face confronted him.

"Aha! good-mornin', Flavia!" said the big major, tipping his hat to the young girl, who looked about eighteen, and who was the possessor of a fresh rosy face, lustrous brown eyes and a figure that was grace itself.

"I'm rather early, ain't I? But we don't have callin' rules in Thunder, by Jove! no, ha, ha, ha!"

Major Sphinx did not wait for an invitation to enter, but stepped inside and dropped upon the first chair that presented itself.

"It 'pears to me, Flavia, that you're gittin' lovelier!" he went on with no regard for the blushes that colored the girl's cheeks at the outspoken compliment. "Some o' these days you'll be discovered by some one an' Thunder City 'll lose its peri, an' some other place will get a queen, eh? by Jove! ha! ha!"

"I don't want to go away," said the young girl, meekly. "This place suits me well enough, just now."

"Especially when Gold Grit comes, eh?"

Flavia dropped her eyes to the floor and did not see the eager look bestowed on her by her caller.

"By the way," continued the major, "he hasn't been here for some time."

"No."

"When will he come again?"

"I do not know."

"Is he still huntin' that old mine, girl?"

"I believe he is."

"What do you think of it, Flavia?"

"I have often told him that I do not believe it exists, but he does not want to give up the chase."

"It may exist," asserted the major suddenly, changing his tone. "I've heard of stranger things than that. I don't know what the young man has to go on, but I wouldn't discourage him. He might leave the country, you know."

The young girl started and seemed to lose color.

"That settles one p'int," ejaculated Major Sphinx inaudibly. "She doesn't want the young chap to go away. Neither do I, by Jove! I should say not, ha, ha!"

Then he turned the battery of his eyes once upon the girl and went on:

"It's kinder queer that we don't know much about him, though he's been here often," he said.

"It is singular," answered Flavia.

"We know more about you, girl. We know that you came to Thunder City in a storm, several years ago—"

"But not much more," laughed Flavia interruptingly.

"No," replied the major seriously; but suddenly smiled. "We've found out something about you since, girl, but here is a young man who calls himself Gold Grit who is huntin' for a lost gold mine, and that's all we know about him, unless—"

The major paused and leaned toward the girl, "unless he's told you something, Flavia."

"I guess he's told me all he knows," was the response. "The truth is, major, Gold Grit knows but little about himself."

"By Jove! Ah, that is so!" exclaimed Major Sphinx. "But what did he tell you, Flavia? I am interested in the young fellow—can't help it, you see, ha, ha!"

Major Sphinx always laughed when he wanted to get at an important point, and though the camp knew it, the young girl did not.

"Gold Grit has no recollection of his early life," continued Flavia. "He says that it is a strange blank to him."

"When does his recollection begin?"

"About three years ago. It is all very strange, isn't it?"

"Very."

"His first remembrance is of a large mining-town on the railroad, and there he first heard of the lost mine which he has been hunting ever since."

"What does he think of his past?" asked the big Nabob, of Thunder City, eagerly. "Of course he has told you his thoughts, his opinions, girl?"

"He thinks that he received a blow at one time that caused the loss of memory. He has a scar over his right ear, and does not know where he got it."

"I have heard of that," remarked Major Sphinx.

"He never told me any more."

The man was silent for a moment.

"You have tried to learn something of his past, haven't you, Flavia?" he asked, when he spoke again.

"Yes. It is natural. We are friends," was the reply. "I have tried to get at Gold Grit's past, but only through the man himself. I had no other way. Isn't there no way of helping him to solve the mystery? He is so anxious!"

A singular light came into Major Sphinx's eyes, but he shook his head.

"I don't see how it can be got at," he exclaimed.

ed. "I never saw a case like it, never did, by Jove! ha, ha! But, Flavia, you don't know when he will come to camp again?"

"I cannot tell."

"He's liable to turn up 'most any time, eh?"

"Yes."

"Does he know they talk o' postin' him?"

Flavia gave a sudden start.

"Who talks of it?"

"Lightning Lay'out. They talk o' shuttin' him off from huntin' along the 'Divide.'"

"I did not know he had any enemies over there!" exclaimed Flavia.

"He ought n't have any anywhere," was the earnest declaration.

"He has one here," and then the girl looked as if she wished she had not spoken.

"One man in Thunder ag'in' Gold Grit?" cried Major Sphinx. "Who is he?"

"Reckless Roy."

"Ah! that fellow!" cried the man, with a half sneer. "I'd like to know why he doesn't like the young bonanza-hunter."

Flavia did not answer, but avoided Major Sphinx's gaze and sought suddenly to turn the conversation.

All at once the sharp report of a pistol-shot came in at the half-open door, and Flavia uttered a quick cry.

"That's nothin'!" ejaculated the Nabob. "Such things ar' common enough in Thunder City."

"But not that revolver!" cried Flavia, springing to the door, and she was beyond the step when Major Sphinx left his chair.

"What do you think has happened, girl?"

"I do not know. Look at the gathering crowd down yonder," and she pointed away. "Ah! we will know in a moment. Anaconda Alf is coming toward us now."

In another moment the tall figure of one of the best known men on the "Divide" halted before the major, and the girl.

There was a good deal of excitement in his eyes.

"They want you down thar, major," he cried.

"Them two came together as they war bound ter, some day."

"What is it?" exclaimed Flavia.

"Gold Grit has killed Reckless Roy, an' ther camp wants his neck!"

A wild cry was Flavia's response.

CHAPTER III.

A DUEL AT TEN PACES.

"GREAT JUPITER! this is the last thing I wanted to happen!" cried Major Sphinx as he recoiled before Anaconda Alf's startling announcement. "Is Reckless Roy really dead?"

"You kin go down thar an' see," was the response. "Besides ther boys want you anyhow."

"Come!" said Flavia. "I am going to him. We will go together," and the three started off, the girl with a white, anxious face, and the major much excited as he questioned Anaconda Alf about the affray.

Let us precede their arrival and see what had happened.

Reckless Roy was one of the most noted men in Thunder City. His adventurous life had been full of broils in which he was usually the aggressor, and from which he always emerged victor.

He was a disagreeable man with strong dislikes, and from the first had manifested much ill-feeling toward Gold Grit, the young mine-hunter.

The youth had tried to avoid Roy, and while his poorly covered insults rankled in the young mine-hunter's heart, he had resolved to bear them in silence.

It was on Reckless Roy's account that Gold Grit did not come oftener to Thunder City.

There was an attraction there that had a certain charm for him, but it was met by the mountain rough's insolence and insult.

Reckless Roy who, despite his nature, seemed to have the whole city at his beck, seemed determined to exile Gold Grit entirely from Thunder City.

The young miner was his special spite.

It happened that Gold Grit had come to Thunder City while Major Sphinx was paying his unannounced visit to Flavia at her cabin.

He had not been there for several weeks, and his absence had rendered the major uneasy for some reason or other.

As for Thunder City in general, it did not seem to care whether Gold Grit came or stayed away.

The youth's best acquaintance in the camp was Happy Hank, the man who presided over the bar of the whisky den, and he never neglected his friend when he came back.

It was not an uncommon sight for the roughs of Thunder to see the two, Gold Grit and Happy Hank, in close conversation at the latter's bar, and while the young bonanza-hunter never drank himself, he oftentimes treated the crowd present.

"Hello! thar's ther bonanza sharp!" exclaimed a man as Gold Grit stepped into the cabin on the morning in question. "I wonder if he's clapped his paws onto ther prize?"

Gold Grit paid no attention to the remark which he must have heard, but walked straight

to the counter and shook hands with Happy Hank.

The crowd in the place at the time surged forward in expectation of a drink, and in a moment the young man was surrounded.

"Haven't you found that turtle's nest yet, hey?" exclaimed a tall and robust man whose eyes had an insolent snap as he leaned toward Gold Grit.

"That is a secret of mine," replied the youth, with a pleasant smile.

"A secret, eh? By Jupiter! if you had yer hands on it you wouldn't be hyer with yer old Lazarus look. Not much, sonny!"

Gold Grit's color suddenly heightened, but he kept his indignation down.

He evidently saw the intentions of the man who faced him, for he knew that he had an enemy in the person of Reckless Roy.

"What will you have, gentlemen?" he asked, treating the big rough's remarks with silence, and glancing from the crowd to Happy Hank. "Name your liquor, and if my friend Hank has it in his treasury, it will be forthcoming at my expense."

The men of Thunder City pushed closer to the counter! all but one.

He drew back and threw his figure to its full height as he looked at the youth.

"I never drink with mountain tramps!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "Thar war one hyer last night, an' he had ter drink alone."

The crowd looked at Gold Grit wondering how he would take this direct insult.

Reckless Roy had spoken with all the venom he could summon.

Gold Grit flushed and smiled.

"I am a tramp, that's a fact," he said, "but one of these days I expect my tramping to end."

"When ther lost bonanza ar' found, I expect?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll want ter buy Thunder City, I presume," sneered Reckless Roy. "Young man, you'll never get enough out o' that bonanza ter buy a ring for ther girl ye'r tryin' ter hoodwink now!"

Gold Grit stepped toward his insulter with resentment flashing up in his eyes.

"You can throw y'ur venom at me, Roy," he said coolly: "but you want to spare those who are my friends!"

The crowd looked, almost stared, at the young miner.

For the first time he had replied boldly to the long line of insults to which he had been subjected by the bronze bully of the camp.

"I hit yer in a tender spot, eh?" laughed Reckless Roy, coarsely. "Don't we all know that you've been stuffin' ther girl with a lot o' trash about yer future prospects? Mebbe you've promised ter make her Queen o' Goldland sometime, when you'll really make her Princess ov Poverty Plat ef ye kin!"

"That's a lie!"

The four words dropped from Gold Grit's tongue like an electric bomb.

Their language was not to be mistaken, and plainer English could not be used.

Reckless Roy seemed to grow white in an instant, and the crowd separated as he put one of his bronzed hands upon his belt.

"I don't allow any fuss hyer, gents," exclaimed Happy Hank, leaning over the counter, and throwing his hand between the two enemies.

It was noticed that he directed his remarks at Reckless Roy.

"A lie is it, eh?" grated the bully of the "Divide" without taking the slightest notice of the interferer. "You will not face me outside o' this shanty, my young tramp."

"Anywhere, if you continue to insult the person aimed at in your remarks," was the cool retort.

"Then you seem ter know who I war drivin' at?"

"You might as well have spoken her name. These gentlemen here know I have but one female acquaintance in Thunder City, and that her name is Flavia."

Reckless Roy burst into a laugh.

"Well, I've nothin' ter swallow!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I repeat that you're hoodwinkin' her with your mountain air-castles, and that she's a fool for takin' ther story in!"

"Let that be your insult, Reckless Roy. It is the insult of a coward, and the venom of a liar!"

Gold Grit stepped toward the door as he spoke the last words.

"You want to watch Reckless," whispered a voice over his shoulder.

The Thunder City bully came forward with a revolver half drawn.

"Do yer mean fight, atom?" he exclaimed.

"If you want to force it, yes!" responded the young miner, through his teeth. "But Happy Hank wants no meeting here."

"Thar's ther hull world outside."

"Let it be outside, then!"

Gold Grit was almost at the door of the mountain resort.

As yet he had not laid his hand on a weapon, and there were some who thought he was facing the tiger unarmed.

Reckless Roy followed him up with eyes that

seemed to blaze, and with the crowd, including Happy Hank, at his back, he sprung from the saloon and halted a few feet beyond the door.

"Is this goin' ter be accordin' ter ther code?" asked Happy Hank of the bully.

"I don't care how yer fix it," was the reply.

"Turn 'em back ter back an' let 'em walk five paces apart at ther word, turn, an' shoot!"

"That'll do!" said Reckless Roy, and Gold Grit nodded assent to the men who looked at him.

The next moment the two enemies were placed back to back in the broad light of day before Happy Hank's place, the saloon-keeper himself helping to perform the service.

Gold Grit had now drawn a silver-mounted revolver, and held it firmly in his hand along his leg.

He was calm and even anxious, and the men who saw the two noticed that Reckless Roy was a head the taller, and that his burly figure would make a breastwork for his young antagonist.

"You kin hardly miss the elephant," whispered Happy Hank to the young bonanza-hunter, as he placed him in position. "But to beat him, you must be quick as a cat. He's ther devil on springs, ef he is a Colossus. Shoot quick, but sure!"

A quiet smile stole over Gold Grit's face as Happy Hank stepped back.

The mountain pards had never seen the youth shoot, and did not know what he could do with the revolver.

"Ready!" suddenly rung out the voice of Anaconda Alf, and a second later the startling command was given:

"Five paces ahead! Forward!"

The two men separated and walked steadily away.

The crowd breathlessly counted the strides.

One—two—three—four—five!

All at once the two duelists wheeled; their right hands went up simultaneously, and the air resounded with a sharp report.

Reckless Roy started sharply, tried to steady himself, and threw up his hands!

Gold Grit stood like a statue in his tracks.

Several men rushed frantically toward the bully of the "Divide," but not soon enough to catch him, for Roy pitched forward with a sharp cry, and fell with a dull thud upon his face!

The sudden ending of the duel seemed to strike the crowd with amazement. All had expected that Roy's luck would not desert him now.

Gold Grit looked into the faces of the crowd; he could hold his breath no longer.

"I hope the man is not dead," he said. "I didn't want his life."

"But you've got it!" cried some one, and a dozen hands went toward as many belts.

"Ef you hedn't come hyer we'd still hev Reckless Roy," continued the same voice. "You made ther fight possible after all. By Jupiter! one person, an' he a boy, shouldn't be allowed ter run ther queen o' ther Divide."

"Not by a long shot!" cried half a dozen roughs, and the crowd came toward Gold Grit with looks that could not be mistaken.

"Somebody go for ther major. We need 'im hyer!" exclaimed Happy Hank, and Anaconda Alf sprung away as if Major Sphinx's needed presence there had just struck him.

The young miner still held the revolver in his hand, and his fingers gave it a new grip as he faced the crowd, ready to launch itself upon him.

"Gentlemen, you want to give this young man a chance," said a new voice, and the men of Thunder City saw a stranger step to Gold Grit's side.

"Whar're you from?" demanded the leader of the toughs.

"From Sunrise," was the reply.

"Who ar' yer, anyhow?"

"Lucifer Lynx!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE THREAD OF LIFE.

THE mention of the name which had been spoken for the first time in Thunder City created some wonder, and a smile or two.

The man who uttered it was a well-appearing person a few years past thirty, with a well-set figure and a clean face. His clothes were good and had not seen a great deal of service, and his wide-brimmed, sombrero-like hat seemed to be on its first campaign.

The coolness and ease with which he spoke told the pards of the "Divide" that he was no ordinary man, or, as some would have expressed it, "a bad dog in a tussle."

Nobody seemed to know where he had come from, and his presence in Thunder City was not known until he was seen at Gold Grit's side.

There were several in the crowd who almost believed that he had popped harlequin-like out of the earth at his feet.

The young miner's look told all that he and his new friend were strangers.

"Lucifer Lynx!" ejaculated Gold Grit to himself. "Who is he? I never heard the name before."

Lucifer Lynx stood erect alongside the young duelist, and looked into the faces of the fierce crowd with a quiet smile at the corners of his mouth.

The leader of the pards seemed taken aback by the name.

"We don't know Mr. Lucifer Lynx," he said, at length. "Thunder City has never had any dealings with a person ov ther name. What might yer business be, stranger?"

At that moment three persons were seen approaching, and the crowd watched them with interest.

"Do we want ther girl hyer?" asked several, with quick glances toward Gold Grit.

"Let 'er come. She won't want to stay when—"

The sentence remained uncompleted and a moment later Major Sphinx, Anaconda Alf and Flavia were on the dueling ground.

"My God! it is true!" broke over the girl's lips when she saw the giant figure of Reckless Roy on the spot where he had fallen. "In heaven's name, how was this brought about?"

She started toward the young bonanza-hunter with a light cry of recognition on her tongue.

In a second they were together.

"This is a catastrophe!" she exclaimed. "Not for the world would I have had it happen."

"I took it as long as I could, Flavia," was the answer. "God knows I didn't want that man's life."

The young couple looked into each other's eyes for a minute, and the girl turned upon the crowd.

"I want the true history of this affair," she said, facing the sullen fellows whose looks boded the bonanza-hunter no good. "I am a citizen of Thunder City like the rest of you. I believe that Gold Grit must have been provoked. How is it, Happy Hank?"

She addressed the barkeeper probably because she knew he and the young prospector were friends, but before he could reply the leader of the pards, a big ruffian named Scar Chick, threw up his hand with a clouded glance at the whisky-seller.

"We'll take ther explanation by an' hy," he said. "Major Sphinx ar' with us now, an' ther young murderer's case ar' under advisement."

Happy Hank kept silence.

Already the major was the central figure of a group of bronzed men, many of whom held cocked revolvers in their hands.

"Who is thet man standin' near ther boy?" asked Sphinx.

"A stranger who jumped out o' a deck from somewhar," was the reply.

"What is he?"

"Don't know, major; calls himself Lucifer Lynx."

During the interrogation the eyes of the major were riveted upon the new-comer with mingled curiosity and astonishment.

"In Satan's name, who is he, anyhow?" Sphinx asked himself. "Lucifer Lynx doesn't answer the question—not by any means. I don't want any unknown quantities on ther 'Divide' just now. If they must come let 'em wait till the Spider gets hyer."

For several minutes the major listened to a dozen men at once.

The meeting at Happy Hank's, the insult, the defiance and the duel were told by several men at the same time.

The accounts were highly colored, for the shooting of Reckless Roy had heated the narrators' blood, and Gold Grit was painted as a young man who had thirsted a long time for a chance to shoot the bully of the "Divide."

One man had seen him practicing at a target in the mountains, another had heard him say that he had but one enemy; thus it went.

"Major, court or no court, Thunder City's goin' ter have life for life!" cried Scar Chick.

"What's a young shallow-pated bonanza crank ter a man o' wor h like Reckless Roy? Didn't Roy head us ther Christmas night we cleaned out Eden Ranch in Lightnin' Lay-out? Look at 'im now!—shot by a boy without a beard!"

The crowd took up the cue thus given, and Major Sphinx heard pistols click and grated oaths on every side.

"Have you looked at Reckless Roy?" he asked.

"What's ther use? A man don't lie thar like him alive!"

The Nabob of Thunder City made no reply, but broke through the crowd, and walked toward Gold Grit's antagonist. All eyes watched him and saw him stoop over the body.

"Hello! this man ain't dead!" he suddenly cried, looking back at the spectators.

"The—Old Harry he isn't!" exclaimed Scar Chick, and he sprung forward and looked into the face of the man whom the major had turned on his back.

"Pisen me! if thar isn't life in Reckless arter all!" ejaculated Scar Chick. "Well, it's so nigh gone out, that we might as well proceed with ther young interloper."

"We cannot do that," declared the major, with the first real firmness he had shown since coming up. "We can't hang a man for killin' another until the killed man is dead, by Jove; no, ha, ha!" he laughed. As they say whar they

run civilized courts, we've got ter await ther result of Reckless Roy's injuries. That's very plain ter me."

By this time Reckless Roy was surrounded by a dozen men, whose looks confirmed the major's discovery.

The bully of Thunder City was not dead, but unconscious.

"Take 'im to his cabin an' let Doctor Monte at him," commanded Major Sphinx.

"The't'll settle it, sure enough!" growled Scar Chick, who evidently did not like the doctor mentioned. "He's worse nor an epidemic on wheels, but we'll take 'im down, major."

Major Sphinx got up and walked toward the young mine-hunter who, with the silent and anxious Flavia, was awaiting the result of the examination.

"By Jove! it was a narrow escape—by the skin o' your teeth as it war, ha, ha!" ejaculated the major as he came up to the young couple. "I'd rather you hadn't come ter Thunder City to-day, boy, but it can't be helped now. Ov course you war bullied," he added in an undertone. "I'd known Reckless Roy some time, an' you didn't plant yer bullet amiss if I'm a jedge, by Jove, no! ha, ha!"

"I don't know," replied Gold Grit. "That man is the only enemy I have, but for all that, I don't want his blood."

"Mebbe not, mebbe not, but you've spilled it, it seems. When did you come ter Thunder?"

"Only a little while before the meeting."

"From the mountains?"

"Yes."

"Still after ther lost bonanza, eh?" asked the major, with a glance at Flavia, who at that moment was watching a number of stalwart men bearing Reckless Roy from the scene of his defeat.

"I think I shall hunt that mine till success crowns my efforts," replied the young prospector.

"Then you think it is no myth?"

"I do."

The answer was made in a voice whose firmness recalled Flavia's attention to the speaker.

"The major knows that I share your belief," the young girl remarked with a smile. "I believe you would not pursue a phantom, Gold Grit."

The young bonanza hunter looked his thanks at the girl, and then turned toward the Nabob of the "Divide" who was eying him with much force.

"We won't discuss the mine now," he said, with a smile that brightened his countenance. "I have shed the blood of one of your citizens. I believe I was not the aggressor. The pards are anxious to avenge the shot that dropped Reckless Roy. If he dies, I suppose I will have to be tried for my life. I don't like the prospective jury, but—"

"You don't have to meet it!" exclaimed Major Sphinx. "Thar's more than one way out o' this affair. I've cut many a Gordian knot in my time—I have, by Jove! ha, ha!"

Gold Grit flushed, and his eyes seemed to catch fire.

"I don't intend to sneak out of the trouble!" he exclaimed, as if Major Sphinx's words poorly hid a cowardly suggestion. "I would sooner face the pards of Thunder City and die like a man than be hunted by a lot of human tigers in the mountains of the 'Red Divide.' No! I will stay here and await the result of Reckless Roy's wounds!"

"Devilish bad thing for me if he does!" muttered the major. "If Doctor Monte can only keep life in Reckless till the Spider comes, I'll win the toss. Ozark will be back from Helena with his cool head an' sage counsel before long, but when the Spider gets hyer, I'll be fully equipped, by Jove! I will, ha, ha!"

At this juncture a footstep behind him caused the mountain Nabob to turn and he stood face to face with the man called Lucifer Lynx.

For a moment the eyes of the two men met, and Flavia, who happened to be watching the stranger closely, fancied she saw him start.

"They tell me your name is Lynx—Lucifer Lynx?" cried the major as he looked the man over searchingly.

"That is my name."

"From hyerabouts?"

"From the vicinity of Sunrise I told the crowd awhile ago," answered the stranger smiling.

"That's not very definite. It takes in too much unknown territory. it does, by Jove! ha, ha!" laughed Sphinx. "War you hyer when the—the difficulty between the gentlemen took place?"

"I saw the open air meeting."

"Well?"

"It was simply a duel in which Reckless Roy got worsted! that's all."

"No unfairness by the young man hyer?"

"Not a bit, sir."

"I would have bet my head on that!" cried Major Sphinx.

"What will be the result of Reckless Roy's wound?"

"I didn't get to examine it."

"Would you know if you did?" and the major half contemptuously looked the man over again.

"I think I would. I've dressed more wounds than you've ever seen."

"The man we want, by Jove, ha, ha!" exclaimed Major Sphinx, grasping Lucifer Lynx's arm. "If Reckless Roy dies, saltpeter can't save Gold Grit from the rope over their pard's over there. 'Divide'! Come with me! I'll see that you're installed as surgeon in this case."

Lucifer Lynx broke from the major's grasp and straightened.

"I didn't come here to keep life in a human devil!" he said fiercely.

CHAPTER V.

A MEDICAL OPINION.

It was apparent a moment after the stranger's outburst that he thought he had spoken with undue haste and emphasis.

"What have you against Reckless Roy?" asked Major Sphinx. "I did not know you had met him before."

"I never did, but I could not help thinking that he forced our young friend here into the duel. Reckless Roy is no enemy of mine."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," cried Flavia, stepping forward. "You will not refuse to attend him and give him the benefit of your knowledge of surgery, will you?"

The eyes of Lucifer Lynx and the young girl met as the latter made this plea.

How could he refuse her?

"Maybe they wouldn't let me interfere after what has happened here," he suggested to her. "Thunder City has a doctor, I believe."

"Doctor Monte, but he won't object," exclaimed Flavia, quickly. "My friend, the major, here, will make all the arrangements."

"I will, by Jove, ha, ha!" was the natural response. "I don't want Reckless to pass in his chips. I can't afford to have him do it. Say you'll be his doctor, Mr. Lynx, and you shall be nothing less."

"I'll do what I can for him."

Flavia showed her joy in a sweet smile and offered Lucifer Lynx her hand.

It was thus settled that the new-comer should be Reckless Roy's doctor as far as Flavia and Major Sphinx could make it so, but the camp had to be consulted in the matter.

This was speedily done by the major with good effect, and before long Lucifer Lynx was examining the bully's wound.

He found that Reckless Roy had received a shot which seriously threatened his life, and when he reported to the dark-faced crowd that stood outside the cabin there was a shaking of hands and some muffled curses.

"They don't touch the boy till Reckless dies if he does!" ejaculated Major Sphinx. "I must tell Lynx that he must keep his patient alive for two weeks. After that he can kill him if he wants to. It was a blamed unfortunate affair all around. I know the youngster and nobody else does. He doesn't know anything about his past life by that singular lack of memory. Well, I do, by Jove, yes, ha, ha!"

It was agreed between the major and the pards of Thunder City, that Gold Grit should consider himself under bond to await the result of Reckless Roy's wounds.

Hatred of the young bonanza-hunter was still intense, and a report of the bully's death would be the signal for his own.

The strange interest that Major Sphinx took in him excited the curiosity of several of the pards, but they could not fathom it.

Gold Grit accepted the terms of the parole, and said to Flavia in resolute terms that he would meet the worst bravely if it came.

With this condition of affairs within its borders, Thunder City settled back to its old mode of life; but the black looks that Gold Grit got whenever he appeared told that the past was not forgotten.

Lucifer Lynx gave Reckless Roy all the attention he needed, and for a while the bully seemed to mend.

Ozark Oil came back from Helena and reported that he had sent the telegram to the Spider.

"We'll wait till he comes!" exclaimed Major Sphinx over this news.

"Doctor Lynx will keep Reckless up till he gets here, then, by Jove! we kin afford ter let 'im go."

"I would like to see this Lucifer Lynx," remarked Ozark. "How did it happen that he turned up just when he was needed?"

The major shook his head.

"I don't know unless fortune sent him," he smiled.

"Fortune?—judge!" exclaimed Ozark. "I don't believe in no special fortunes, I don't. By Jupiter! my dear major—"

"Hush!" interrupted Major Sphinx raising his hand. "Somebody is just outside the door. Maybe it's the new doctor himself. He comes 'round sometimes, and—"

The door opened almost noiselessly at this juncture and, sure enough, Lucifer Lynx made his appearance.

Ozark Oil's eyes grew wide in an instant.

"Jehosaphat! Satan himself!" ejaculated the man just from Helena, and then he fastened his black orbs steadily upon the new doctor. "By Jove! just in time!" exclaimed the major.

"This is a gentleman you haven't met," and he waved his hand toward Ozark Oil as he spoke.

"My best friend, doctor, Ozark Oil of Idaho." Lucifer Lynx held out his hand which Ozark took rather charily, and then stepped back again.

"How's yer patient?" asked the major.

"He is going down hill."

"Jupiter Pluvius!" cried Major Sphinx. "That man mustn't die yet! The boy's life depends on him."

A smile appeared at the corners of Lucifer Lynx's mouth.

"Can't you keep him up for—let me say—ten days?"

"The young bonanza-hunter won't run off."

"I have just come from him," said Lynx. "There isn't a drop of coward blood in his veins. He won't run a step. He clings to the assertion that Reckless Roy, by insulting his best friend, brought on the duel."

"I guess that's so," remarked the major. "I understand since that the 'best friend' is the girl, Flavia."

"I suspected as much," replied Lynx.

"If Reckless dies the spell will be broken, and the boy will be hard to save. I don't like the situation. Doctor, can't you keep the wounded man alive ten days?"

"Why ten days?" asked Lucifer, looking into Major Sphinx's eyes.

"Pardon me, but I cannot tell you why just now," answered the Nabob, starting at the unexpected question.

"By Jupiter! that's a way ter make ther youngster go if he doesn't want ter!" flashed the bronze tough who had not spoken before.

Lucifer Lynx turned his eyes upon Ozark Oil.

"How's that?" he asked.

"By force, sir!" exclaimed Ozark. "He doesn't hev ter stay hyer an' be hanged even if he wants ter! If I had been hyer ther duello wouldn't hev taken place."

"How would you have prevented it?"

"I'd hev picked Gold Grit up an' tossed 'im out o' ther way!" And Ozark Oil looked big enough to do it. "Did you tell him, doctor, that Reckless war goin' down ther grade?"

"Yes."

"An' he said he wouldn't go away?"

"He said he preferred to face Thunder City than run off and be hunted on the 'Divide.' He knows that the men of Lightning Lay-out on the other side have outlawed him because he is hunting a lost bonanza."

"Hang me, if he wouldn't be between the devil an' the deep sea if he left camp!" cried Ozark.

"He would, by Jove! ha, ha!" laughed the major, but his countenance suddenly relapsed into seriousness. "One or two things must be done. Life must be kept in Reckless Roy's body for ten days, or Gold Grit must go away. I prefer the former event."

"Let me try my hand on him," ejaculated Ozark Oil, starting toward the door. "I think I kin fix things satisfactorily. I'm a whole team as a persuader when it has ter be done."

"No force to-night, Ozark!" cried the major after his tool, but there was no reply and Sphinx and Lucifer Lynx were alone.

"There is something strange about that young man," said the doctor, dropping into a chair and looking across a small table at the major. "They tell me that he knows nothing about his past life."

"I believe that is true," was the reply.

"When did you first see him, major?"

The deep brown—almost black—eyes of Lucifer Lynx were riveted upon Major Sphinx as the question was put.

"I saw him 'first soon after I located here," was the reply. "He was then, as he is now on the hunt of that mythical mine which will turn his head if he keeps it up."

The stranger-surgeon smiled.

"I once heard of a case of loss of memory," resumed Lynx, "but it did not happen in these parts."

"How was it?"

"It occurred in New York City, some years ago. A wealthy man there was murdered in his house one night by some robbers who had been attracted by his money. He had an only child, a son, who was approaching manhood at the time. This son came home while the thieves were in the house, and received a severe blow at their hands. It was at first thought he was killed, as his father had been, but he afterward revived and got well physically. Strange to say, the blow on the head resulted in a complete loss of memory, and the young man was placed in an asylum by friends where he now is, a hopeless mental wreck. I remember this strange story so well because I followed it in the newspapers at the time, and also because I was then making a specialty of mental diseases."

"I never heard of the case at all," declared Major Sphinx. "It is a singular one, sure enough. I don't want any blows of that sort, by Jove, no! ha, ha! But what do you think of such cases, doctor? Is the young man you referred to, or a person like him, liable to recover his memory?"

There was intense curiosity in Major Sphinx's manner, although he tried to conceal it.

"There is one chance in a thousand, hardly that," was the reply.

"Then the person to whom you have referred will never get his memory back?"

"The chances are against him."

"What about Gold Grit? You say you have heard of the strange blank in his life."

"There's a chance for him."

Major Sphinx started.

"What will give him back his recollection of the past?"

"Oh, several things, major. A severe blow on the head might do it, or the sudden appearance before him of the person who—"

"The person who—what?" cried Major Sphinx, leaving his chair and leaning excitedly across the table. "You will excuse me, doctor, but I am deeply interested in Gold Grit. If there really is a chance for the mental blank to be filled, I want to know it beforehand. You say it may be filled by the sudden appearance before him of a certain person?"

"Yes; the person who gave him the scar I find on his head," answered Lucifer Lynx.

"My God! you don't say so?"

"That is my opinion," coolly remarked Lynx. "But I must go back to my patient. I will keep him alive for ten days, if I can, major."

"Do it and send your bill to me!" was the response.

"There shall be no charges. I'm not practicing now. Good-night," and the cabin door opened and shut on the figure of Lucifer Lynx.

"Jerusalem!" cried Major Sphinx, when he found himself alone. "In Satan's name, who is that man? If Gold Grit is likely to get his memory back by the appearance of a certain man, somebody must not come to Thunder City. Ah! here's the man I want!"

Major Sphinx sprung forward with a cry. Ozark Oil had come back.

"Great Caesar! Ozark. You've got to go to Helena and countermand the telegram. The Spider must not come here yet!"

"Too late, major. He's on his way hyer now."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SPIDER ON DECK.

FOR the next few days nothing occurred to break the usual life of Thunder City.

Reckless Roy was fighting death with all his power, but the man who watched the combat with singular interest feared it was a hopeless one.

Gradually the pards of the mountain camp became of the same opinion, and they began to notice Gold Grit with looks that boded the young bonanza-hunter no good.

Meanwhile Major Sphinx was waiting impatiently for the Spider.

He did not want this person to enter Thunder City unannounced, and for several days Ozark had watched the road leading to Helena.

Lucifer Lynx still attended Reckless Roy.

He had numerous callers, all dark-faced men, who came in for a moment, and who went out with teeth set and hands clinched.

The stranger doctor knew what it all meant.

On the ninth night after his interview with Major Sphinx, a storm came down upon Thunder City with the fury of ten thousand demons.

The night became one of intense gloom, and the rain came down in sheets, while the wind threatened to blow the cabins from the ground.

All that day Reckless Roy had enjoyed a change for the better, at which his doctor looked surprised and delighted, and had said to himself more than once that some fortune was interfering for the young prospector.

"If it comes to the worst, we will fight it out," he murmured; and then, in a moment, added:

"Ah, major! you don't know what lies at the end of your shrewd play for a solid million!"

At this time a man on horseback was nearing Thunder City.

He had a youth for a guide, and both were rain-drenched.

The man was handsome; this could be seen by the lightning-flashes, despite the condition of his garments and his drooping sombrero.

The couple had crossed the mountains, and were on the Idaho side of the "Divide."

After a while they came upon Thunder City, with here and there a light visible amid the storm.

Happy Hank's saloon was the first place reached by the horseman and his guide.

"That's a mountain drink den," he said to the boy. "We can't find Major Sphinx without assistance. You don't know where his shanty is, you say?"

"No," answered the boy.

"Then get down and inquire of some one inside."

Need we inform the reader now that the man was the Spider from New York?

He had come in response to the major's telegram, and somehow or other had not been stopped by Ozark.

Perhaps the storm had driven Ozark Oil to shelter.

In obedience to the Spider's command, the boy slipped from the saddle and pushed open the door of Happy Hank's saloon.

Happy Hank was alone, and was in the act of

shutting up for the night behind his last customer when the boy guide made his appearance.

"Whar did ther storm blow you from?" cried Hank, at sight of the rain-drenched boy.

"From Helena."

"Jehosaphat! no!"

"It is true. I've guided a man over the mountains, an' I want to know where Major Sphinx's cabin is."

Happy Hank was seen to start, and the next moment he was leaning over the counter with his eyes apparently in the act of starting from his head.

Did the genius of the whisky den suspect the character of the arrival from Helena?

"A—man—from—Helena?" he asked in gasps.

"Yes."

"Whar is he?"

"Outside on his horse."

Happy Hank sprung over the counter and rushed to the door; the next moment he had disappeared.

The man waiting in the storm found himself suddenly accosted by the whisky-dealer.

"They say you're just in from Helena, an' that you want ter find Major Sphinx?" cried Happy Hank.

"That is true. You are—"

"Happy Hank, o' Eden Lodge," was the answer. "You must be chilled ter ther bone. Come in an' take some o' my blood heater."

"I believe I will," and to Happy Hank's satisfaction the man dismounted.

The proprietor of Eden Lodge could hardly wait till the man had passed into his trap, so anxious was he to get a glimpse of his face.

"That's ther man ther major's expectin'!" ejaculated Happy Hank. "He comes ter Thunder City because Gold Grit dropped Reckless Roy. Why did Major Sphinx beg ther new doctor ter keep Reckless alive ten days? Ther time ar' up to-morrow, an' this cuss comes to-night from ther East. If I war sartain it all means good ter ther youngster, I wouldn't care a dollar, but somehow or other it crowds me thet it doesn't!"

Happy Hank stepped nimbly behind the bar and set his best liquor before the major's pard.

He saw the rain-struck mustache, the fine face and jet-black eyes of the Spider.

What an elegant sport he would make in Western costume, and Happy Hank thought of this as he eyed him.

The Spider drank off his whisky like a person who had pleaded often at a bar of the kind.

"Don't make it long between drinks. You need suthin' ov thet nature," said Happy Hank.

"How's ther East, anyway?"

The man gave the barkeeper a singular look.

"Do you know me?" he asked.

"No, but you're from Helena, an' thet's East," said Happy Hank. "How ar' things thar?"

"See here! You can't make a newspaper out of me!" laughed the Spider. "Besides, I don't know a thing about Helena. I didn't stop two hours in the town. I'm from further East. Now, where is Major Sphinx?"

"In a minute," said Hank, glancing at the boy who was watching the horses from the door.

"Did you hear about our fracas hyer?"

"No."

"Well, we had a big one hyer about ten days ago."

"Bloodshed?"

"I should rejoice ter smile," ejaculated Happy Hank. "Gold Grit dropped Reckless Roy—"

"Gold Grit?" echoed the Spider.

"Ther bonanza-hunter ov ther 'Divide.'"

From that moment the drenched sport was interested.

"What was the end of the scrape?" he asked.

"Thar's no end yet, an' thar won't be till Reckless dies, or gets well."

"He was not shot dead, then?"

"No. He war hoverin' 'twixt earth an' glory all week; but ter-day he took a new turn, an' Doctor Lynx says he's likely ter pull through. You're a friend o' ther major's, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"An' old friend, too?"

"Yes."

"Didn't he send for yer?"

The Spider hesitated as if Happy Hank had reached forbidden ground.

"Never mind. I thought he sent for yer, but I'll not give it away," continued Hank. "He's had Ozark watchin' ther trail for several days. I guess he don't expect yer in a storm like ther one that's givin' us good-by. Cap'n, I want ter say that I'm Gold Grit's friend, like ther major ar', but I can't proclaim it in Thunder just now. Ther who'e set's ag'in' him, an' if Reckless Roy should go t'other way an' drop off, jewhizz! what a time thar'll be!"

The barkeeper saw the lips of his listener meet with firmness, and the dark eyes suddenly got a new light.

"This man is for Gold Grit, too," he muttered. "I guess we kin muster a good squad ef it comes ter that!"

The Spider stepped back with a movement which told Happy Hank that he could be detained no longer, and the barkeeper volunteered to show him Major Sphinx's cabin.

The offer was accepted, and the saloon was left to take care of itself for a few moments.

Outside, the storm had spent its fury and might be called at an end.

The spaces between the cabins were drenched and here and there pools of water stood.

Happy Hank led the Spider straight to the major's cabin and halted at the door.

"You'll find yer friend inside," he said to the sport, and then added as he touched his arm, "Remember! I'll stand by Gold Grip if he needs help."

The Spider made no answer, but threw his bridle-rein to his boy guide and stepped to the door.

A moment afterward Happy Hank heard an exclamation in the cabin, and if he could have looked inside he would have seen Major Sphinx grasping the hand of the man who had come.

"By Jove, ha, ha!" ejaculated the major as he looked into the Spider's eyes. "If you ain't just in time fry me for a salmon! You don't know what has happened!"

"Yes, I do. The young gold-pigeon shot Reckless Roy."

Major Sphinx dropped the hand.

"Did you see Ozark?" he exclaimed.

"No. I got my information of an individual called Happy Hank."

"Who talks like a machine!" cried the major.

"Well, it is true. The boy's life war saved by a hair. If I hadn't diskivered that Reckless Roy warn't dead, they'd hev roped him as sartain as Styx! It war ther luckiest find ov my life, it was, by Jove, ha! ha! Thar's not the least doubt of his identity. He doesn't recollect a thing about the past, but I want to ask one question now. Are you sure that the detective you mentioned in your letter was drown-ed?"

A broad smile illumined the Spider's countenance.

"You don't think I'd send a lie all that distance, eh, major?" he laughed.

"I don't want to think it. I wouldn't do it for a thousand; but thar's a man hyer I don't like."

"Who is he?"

"The person who has been doctorin' Reckless Roy—Lucifer Lynx."

"What is he like?"

Major Sphinx described the strange surgeon in a few apt words.

"Where is he?" asked the Spider. "I want to see this man as soon as possible."

Before the major could reply the loud voices of a dozen men were heard before the shanty.

"Something has happened!" exclaimed the Nabob, bounding to the door. "Mebbe thar's another challenge from Lightnin' Lay-out—"

"Ther time is up! We want the young bonanza sharp's blood!"

The loud interruption seemed to rivet Major Sphinx in the doorway.

"Blood for blood! Ha! thar you ar', major! You can't hold us off any longer. Reckless Roy is dead!"

"Dead! My God!"

Major Sphinx found his tongue as he started back.

"Did you hear that, Julian?" he continued, wheeling upon the Spider. "If it is true, it can mean only one thing. We've got to fight for the boy!"

"Come along er stay whar ye ar' major!" exclaimed Scar Chick, the leader of the mountain mob, looking fiercer than ever without a hat and in a dark red shirt. "All Tartarus can't cheat Thunder City any longer. Ef you don't b'lieve thar Roy is dead ask Doctor Lynx. Hyer he is now!"

"Look!" cried the major to the Spider. "Yonder is the man I don't like. Out there is Lucifer Lynx!"

Just then the man called thus was seen to halt before the mob that stood in the light pouring from the major's cabin, and his hand went swiftly up and covered the crowd.

"Men of Thunder City," he cried. "In your midst stands the man who buried Reckless Roy out of the world!"

The answer was silence.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MOB LOSES.

JULIAN the Spider standing in Major Sphinx's cabin saw only the man who faced the roughs of Thunder City with outstretched hand, and with the startling accusation just delivered still ringing on the air.

"When did that man come to Thunder?" he asked with a glance at the major.

"The day Gold Grit shot Reckless Roy. Do you know him?"

"Don't I?" ejaculated the Spider. "He is the last mortal I expected to see here. What will the pards do? Will they swallow his words, or will they kill him in his boots?"

Lucifer Lynx took a step toward the silent crowd, and in still sterner tones and with greater emphasis repeated the charge.

"The death of Reckless Roy is not on the boy's hands, I say!" he exclaimed. "He had taken a turn for the better. The man was going to get well, but there are men among you, pards of Thunder, who wanted him to die."

"That's pretty bold," averred Scar Chick.

"It is the solid truth!" was the swift answer.

"I see the man who stole like a thief into Reckless Roy's shanty awhile ago and left the print of his fingers on his throat."

"Name him! Show us ther galoot!" rose from the crowd.

"Not now," replied Lynx with a smile. "The life of a devil like Reckless Roy is nothing to me. The world is better off without him. I am here to say that the young mine-hunter is not to be touched because the big bully of Thunder City lies dead on his cot!"

The following moment the strange doctor had turned his back to the astonished crowd and was walking off.

"Cool as Satan himself!" exclaimed the Spider without an effort. "What will the mob do, now, major?"

"Hang the boy, if they do anything," was the response. "Lynx may have warned him before he came here, but he always said he would never run away."

"What say you now?" said the coarse voice of Scar Chick at the open door, and the major and Julian saw that worthy's face and figure in the light. "Warn't that a pretty pack o' lies we got squar' in the teeth?"

"It was, by Jove! ha, ha!" laughed Major Sphinx. "So Reckless is dead?"

"Dead as Adam!"

"It must have been sudden."

"Rather sudden!" and there was a strange twinkle in the depths of Scar Chick's eyes. "That man ain't goin' ter keep us from seein' ther young mine-hunter, accordin' ter agreement. You know, major, he war under bond as it war, ter await ther result ov Reckless Roy's injuries."

"Yes, but—"

"Them injuries hev resulted fatally, consequently ther time is up!"

"We only want the young man to have a fair show."

Scar Chick turned from Major Sphinx upon the speaker, who was Julian the Spider.

"Who is this man?" he asked, glancing from the New Yorker to Major Sphinx.

"My friend, Julian Jayne, just from Helena."

"Oho! I thought he war some new doctor from Sunrise," sneered Scar Chick as his eyes ran up and down the Spider's figure.

"A fair show for ther youngster, eh? Is that what yer want, Mr. Jayne?"

"Yes."

"Follow us an' see him get it!" exclaimed Chick, drawing back and placing himself at the head of the impatient crowd. "Forward!" he cried to the pards. "We want ter know only one thing, boys, an' thet is thet Reckless Roy is dead."

A responsive shout full of vengeance was the response, and the crowd got in motion again.

Major Sphinx and Julian exchanged quick looks.

"If Ozark war only hyer!" exclaimed the Nabob.

"We can get along without him!" passed over the Spider's lips. "If this is my introduction to Thunder City, I rather like it. Come, major; we follow the wild men of the 'Divide.' It is one thing to hang a man before you catch him; quite another to do it in reality."

Major Sphinx fell in behind Julian with hardly a vestige of color in his face.

"If they stretch Gold Grit the whole big game is up!" he said to himself. "Our game will then amount to nothing. The boy is worth his weight in gold. I'd give a thousand if he's run away—I would, by Jove! ha, ha!"

Thunder City was not large and the steady tramp of the twenty stalwart men led by Scar Chick ended soon before a little cabin.

"It can't be that he knows nothin' ov it," said the leader in a whisper over his shoulder. "Lucifer Lynx must have told him that Reckless ar' dead. Shall I try ther door?"

"Make him show up!"

Scar Chick stepped forward and raised the cabin latch.

"He didn't keep his word!" burst suddenly from the ruffian's throat. "The coward has vamoused ther ranch!"

A cry of rage rose above the crowd and brightened Major Sphinx's eyes.

"This suits me!" he muttered. "The bonanza is not lost after all."

And he leaned forward to see what would follow the discovery.

A lamp burning on the little table in the middle of the room ahead told all who looked that Gold Grit's cabin was empty.

The bird had certainly flown, and the prize so eagerly sought by the crowd was not within their reach.

For several moments the discovery was followed by silence; then, led by the furious Scar Chick, the whole lot began to curse Lucifer Lynx.

It was plain to them that the brown-eyed doctor had posted Gold Grit, and have even assisted in his flight.

Woe to him if he ever fell into the clutches of the pards of the "Divide."

"Mebbe he's with the girl?" suggested some one at this juncture, and the suggestion was taken up by several until the crowd started off again.

"I want you to see the angel of Thunder City," remarked Major Sphinx to Julian. "You don't find many like her out o' doors."

"Who is she?"

"We call her Flavia. Scar Chick an' his pards will find her their watch if they catch her in the right humor."

"Flavia! I never heard of her," assured Julian. "You never wrote me, major, that such a woman existed."

"It wasn't necessary, I thought. She has nothin' to do with the bonanza more than she an' the boy an' friends—*friends!* You understand the term, by Jove! ha, ha."

Julian made no reply, but his eyes got an anxious look, and from that moment he was eager to see the girl called Flavia by the major.

"Hyer we ar! Now, whar's ther angel ov Thunder City?" exclaimed Scar Chick.

The crowd had reached another cabin not far from the one first visited. It was the home of Flavia.

"Hello!" called out several voices. "Open up ther palace, Flavia. Thunder City is on a lark to-night!"

Almost immediately the door of the little cabin opened, and, lamp in hand, the beauty of the "Divide" appeared on the threshold.

"Great Caesar! is that your seraph?" cried Julian the Spider.

"She's nobody else!" answered Sphinx. "I don't blame Gold Grit for tyin' a fairy like that. What do you say, Julian? By Jove! you've seen that girl before!"

The man from New York was looking at Flavia with a countenance that startled Major Sphinx.

It was almost colorless, and his eyes seemed on the point of flying from his head.

"No!" he said. "She's entirely strange to me, but who thought o' finding a creature like that here?"

"What is it, gentlemen?" asked the girl, as she took in the scene before her, the burly figures and dark stern faces of the best representatives of Thunder City.

"Is ther young mine shark hyer?" blurted Scar Chick. "He's left his vest, an' we want him just now. Reckless Roy is dead at last, an' ther bond is forfeited!"

The lamp did not fall from Flavia's hand; she lost no color and did not start.

"She knows all about it," muttered Scar Chick. "We didn't fetch her a particle o' news. Lucifer Lynx has been hyer, too!"

"Make her talk business!" growled a voice behind the Thunder City sport. "We can't stand hyer all night on her pleasure."

Scar Chick went toward Flavia.

"You heard me!" he said. "I want ter know whar Gold Grit is."

"I don't know!"

The answer was so emphatic that the big rough recoiled.

"No foolishness, Flavia!" he cried, recovering in a moment. "You've no right ter presume that you kin do everything hyer because this camp is yer home. It'll do you no good ter stand by a young wolf whose hands ar' red with Reckless Roy's blood."

Flavia seemed on the eve of saying something but desisted.

"We want the truth," continued Scar Chick, cying the girl sternly. "Do you repeat that you don't know whar Gold Grit is?"

"I do."

"Lucifer Lynx has been hyer?"

"What of it!" demanded Flavia. "Must I account to you for all my visitors?"

Scar Chick appeared to take no notice of the question.

"He war hyer since Reckless died?" he cried.

"If you want to know it—yes!" exclaimed the girl. "He doubtless told you that he believes that Reckless Roy went sooner than the wound would have taken him, that he found finger marks on the throat of the corpse when he returned to it after a brief absence. The man who shall account at the bar of God for the death of Reckless Roy is not Gold Grit, the mine-hunter of the 'Divide!' You will excuse me now, gentlemen. I wish to retire."

The girl and her lamp disappeared with the last word, and the cabin door was shut in the face of the crowd.

"Grit to the backbone!" ejaculated Major Sphinx, who, with Julian, had not been seen by Flavia. "This ends the hunt for Gold Grit in Thunder City. The young bonanza galoot is safe for to-night at least. It was a narrow escape, it was, by Jove! ha, ha."

The sudden termination of the interview had a depressing effect on the mob. The loud curses of the mountain ruffs sunk into silence, and without a word Scar Chick led the mob away.

"We will go back to my shanty," said Major Sphinx to Julian. "I want to give you the whole lay-out so you will know where to take hold. The boy isn't gone if he did give Thunder City the slip to-night. It is time for Ozark to be back. I want you to meet the new pard whom you have never seen, an' I'm eager to

stand you two together an' see what a magnificent team I have."

The Spider interposed no objection, and leaving the disappointed mob to drown its chagrin at Happy Hank's counter, the two went back to the major's cabin.

There Julian divested himself of the garments that had been drenched by the storm, and donned a suit of the major's, which was a world too large for him.

"All at once the door opened, and Major Sphinx uttered an ejaculation of joy.

It was Ozark!

"He's come!" cried the major. "Hyer's the invincible imp we've called from New York! Ozark, this is Julian the Spider."

Ozark Oil did not offer to shake hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

BONANZA NUMBER TWO.

If Ozark Oil had been watching for Julian on the Helena trail, his garments were dry despite the severe storm that had lately passed over.

Major Sphinx noticed this.

"By Jove! I see how it was!" he ejaculated to himself. "Ozark was not on the trail when Julian came over it, an' this is why they have not met before. But why didn't Ozark offer to shake hands with his new pard? It's an almighty cool reception, seems to me. Mebbe Ozark is jealous."

Julian the Spider did not appear to regard Ozark in the light of a rival; but he could not help watching him covertly, and in a curious manner.

"Thar ar' men in the mountains," suddenly said Ozark.

"Between hyar an' the liar's nest beyond the 'Divide'?" asked the major.

"Yes."

"Who are they?"

"Ther toughs o' Lay-out."

"Do you think they are comin' here?"

"They ar' bound for no place else."

"Thar'll be a time if they come," exclaimed Major Sphinx, glancing at Julian. "Thar's war eternal between Lightnin' Lay-out an' Thunder City. We don't like a hair o' their heads, an' they hate us grandly. The boys ought to know this."

He looked at Ozark as he uttered the last sentence; it was in the nature of a command.

"They'll find it out when the Lay-out lizards get hyar," snapped Ozark. "I am goin' out now. When you want me ag'in, major, I'll be on hand; mebbe before!"

Ozark Oil was in no good humor, and it was apparent to the Nabob of the "Divide," who knew him so well, that something had occurred to irritate him.

"I may want you soon, Ozark," answered Major Sphinx. "Thar are three of us now—a team that can't be equaled in America! Reckless Roy is dead, and the boy has run off. Lucifer Lynx's fine Italian hand is in this somehow. I'll bet my head on it—I will, by Jove! ha, ha!"

Impatient to get beyond the shanty door, Ozark Oil barely waited till the major finished, when he took his departure.

"So that's the man I'm ter call pard, eh?" he cried, stopping a few feet from the cabin and looking toward it with flashing eyes. "That is the galoot I sent ther dispatch ter from Helena! Ther major expects ter make a double team of us; but he never will! By Jupiter, I'd sooner work with Lucifer Lynx, an' he's a devil hyer for a purpose. Julian the Spider, eh? An' fresh from New York! Thar war a time when he had a different name, an' he's liable ter hev it breathed inter his ear afore mornin'. We work with that man? I'll turn Injun first!"

"So that is Ozark?" said Julian the Spider to Major Sphinx, when the Nabob's tool had left them to themselves.

"Yes. Ain't he a daisy?"

"In what way?" quietly asked the man from New York.

"In any way you take him! He works wherever I put him, an' you'll find him a pard worth his weight in gold."

A sudden frown darkened the Spider's face, and before he spoke again he went to the door and looked out upon the spectral cabins of the camp.

"I want to be excused," he said, coming back and resuming his chair at the table.

"From what?" asked the major with a start.

"From serving with that man."

"With Ozark?"

"Yes."

"What's wrong with him? You never saw him before—"

"Pardon me, I have!" and Julian leaned across the table and grasped the major's wrist.

"You don't say so, by Jove!" exclaimed Major Sphinx. "This beats five aces in one deck! You know Ozark?"

Julian's eyes got a glitter.

"I ought to know him, an' I do," he cried. "But I am not here to underrate the man to you. I have come to Thunder City to play out the hand we've tried to get so long. I am once more Julian the Spider. In New York I was Richard Ragan, Jr., of Sixth avenue. I have not seen the young man called Gold Grit, but I

am willing to take your statement, major, that he is the *right person*. I did get a good look at Lucifer Lynx, and I find him to be—whom do you think, major?"

"The Lord knows!" ejaculated Major Sphinx.

"Frank Hunter, the New York detective who gave me so much trouble."

"And the man who fell into the river one night, as you wrote in your last letter?"

"The same man!"

"Jupiter! But you wrote that he would never trouble us."

Julian smiled.

"I thought so at the time. I saw the body of that man sink like a cannon, but he is here! Lucifer Lynx now, is he? Ha! that's a good name for a man who is on the trail he is on. I give him credit for being shrewd, cool, brave, and untiring!"

During this recital Major Sphinx sat bolt upright in his chair with very little color in his face, and with his eyes fixed almost starefully upon the Spider.

The revelation was the most startling one he had ever listened to.

Lucifer Lynx a detective, and on the "Divide" on business?

He had already formed an aversion, he could not tell why, to the man; but he had not dreamed that he was the person Julian called him.

"Why," he said suddenly, "I could have killed him a dozen times this week."

"But you did not, major?" grinned the Spider.

"Unfortunately no!" was the response. "He came here more than once and we talked about the patient he had in charge. He kept Reckless Roy alive as long as he could for my sake. I wanted him alive when you came, Julian, for I thought we'd have to stand between Thunder City and Gold Grit. Ozark never suspected the man, and Ozark has the eyes of a rat."

"Ozark be hanged!" said Julian between his teeth. "Lucifer Lynx is the New York ferret. You know what he wants here?"

Major Sphinx drew back.

"I know, Julian. Do you think he recognized me?"

"There's no doubt of it," was the reply, which was torture to the Thunder City Nabob.

"What is his plan?"

"Can you not guess?" laughed the Spider, and then he went on before the major could speak. "He wants first the heir to the New York millions, next, Major Sphinx, dead or alive—"

"By Jove! he shall get neither!" interrupted the Nabob, and his clinched hand fell like a hammer upon the table. "I'm willing to put you against Lucifer Lynx, Julian. Ozark is good, but you are better. Besides, we are the deepest in the game. This man will come back—not as Lucifer Lynx, perhaps. While Flavia is here Gold Grit will not go away."

"Does he love the girl?"

There was anxiety and expectancy in Julian's eyes as he put the question.

"Yes," answered the major, bluntly. "I wasn't long finding this out. She loves him, too. It's a case o' mutual love, by Jove! ha, ha!"

"When did it begin?"

"I don't know—the first time they met, I suspect. She has always been the attraction that draws him to Thunder City. The lost bonanza can't keep him away always, though he is bent on finding it."

"Now," said Julian, after a pause, "what about her?"

"She came here in a storm."

"So did I," laughed the Spider. "But go on."

"She said that the people she war traveling with were not relatives of hers, as well as she could recollect. She got into Thunder City one night on a horse, and hardly knew how."

"But in a storm, you say?"

"Yes. We took the back trail next day, an' found a wagon in a gulch with a woman an' a little child under it."

"No man?"

"We didn't find any."

"But there must have been one."

"Flavia said there was—a man named Wildfoot. If he lived through the storm, he never hunted Flavia up. Since then one o' our men found a bundle o' papers wedged in between two rocks not far from where we discovered the wagon. Some o' em war legal documents about real estate and the like. We didn't take much stock in 'em, as nobody cared for Wildfoot, whoever he war, an' I had my hands full keepin' track o' Gold Grit."

"Whar ar' those papers?"

"Flavia kind o' wanted 'em, an' we handed 'em over to her."

"Did she keep them?"

"I don't know."

Major Sphinx seemed to wonder why all this curiosity, and all these questions.

He was anxious to get back to another subject.

"Major," suddenly continued Julian, "I'm going to stretch my legs about Thunder City."

"Wait till morning. You'll feel like stretching 'em then."

"I prefer it now."

"Shall I show you the p'int of interest—the way ter Happy Hank's—"

"I'll find them all out for myself," interrupted the Spider. "I soon get used to a big place like this, and then you know that I'm no stranger to the shape o' mountain camps. To-morrow I'll plan the winning campaign, major. The game is big, and the cards of Fortunatus must be held by us."

"What if Lucifer Lynx gets them?"

"But he can't," said Julian, shutting his teeth. "The man who won in New York in his battle with the river cannot succeed on the Red Divide! I will make it impossible! There are millions at stake in this game, and I don't intend to see them swept across the board into the lap of a box with a double skin. I'll sweep the corridors of Tartarus first!"

"By Jove, so will I, ha, ha," exclaimed Major Sphinx. "You don't look like a dandy in that suit o' mine, Julian; but it's after dark and our critics are all at Happy Hank's. I'll be here when you come back."

Julian the Spider pushed back his chair and surveyed his poorly fitting clothes with a faint smile.

"They're good enough for all the calls I'll make!" he cried with a laugh and vanished.

"A new trail an', by Jupiter! a good one if I'm a judge!" ejaculated the Spider when once beyond the cabin. "Did he go by the name of Wildfoot when he cut loose from the world? It looks that way. If I can get my fingers on them papers I'll be willing almost to let the major take the boy."

He started off and, not very strange to say, followed the exact route taken by the Thunder City mob to Flavia's abode.

If anybody was watching him he did not know it, and in a little while he stood before a little cabin beyond whose one window was a light that made him lean forward.

Julian's face almost touched the glass, and the sight he saw beyond the window parted his lips with a light cry.

Flavia was alone, and the abundance of rich brown hair that fell lovely about her face rendered her more beautiful than ever.

"Here's a bonanza the major knows nothing about!" exclaimed the Spider reaching eagerly toward the latch.

"Look here! Ar' you as cool as you used ter be?" said a coarse whisper at his side.

Julian recoiled and looked at the speaker.

A man, his physical equal, and dark of feature like all the stalwart men of the "Divide," stood within arm's length of him.

At a glance he saw it was Ozark.

"I mean just what I say," continued Ozark.

"Six men—ther flower ov Lightning Lay-out—hev come ter camp for a shootin' bout. You used ter have sand—when they called you Devil Jule. Dare you help me take the six unawares?"

The hand of the Spider went to his belt.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FLIGHT.

MEANTIME, what had become of Gold Grit, the young prospector of the "Divide?"

The reader will recollect his frequently expressed determination to remain in Thunder City, and await the result of Reckless Roy's wound.

The young man knew the hatred treasured up against him by the roughs of the "Divide," but he was not going to show any coward blood by sneaking from the camp until the affair was settled.

The mountain mob organized in a few moments by Scar Chick after the death of Reckless Roy, had failed to find Gold Grit in his cabin, and the tramp to Flavia's abode had resulted in disappointment.

It was plain that, despite his assertions, the young gold-hunter was not in camp.

It was shortly after Reckless Roy's sudden death when Gold Grit heard the door of his cabin opened, and he saw Lucifer Lynx standing before him.

There was an anxious and eager look in the deep, brown eyes of the detective, as we can call him now, but he did not betray his business as he came forward.

"Well, doctor, how is your patient by this time?" asked Gold Grit with a smile.

"He is dead."

The young bonanza trailer started and let slip a slight cry of astonishment.

"Then I've got to face the pards of Thunder City!" he said through his teeth. "But when did this sudden change occur? This morning you gave me to understand that he was improving."

"He was then," smiled Lucifer Lynx. "Sudden changes are not infrequent on the 'Red Divide,' my boy. Death's agents come when they are least expected. I had left Reckless Roy for five minutes—not more. When I went back the man was dead!"

"What did it?"

The detective's eyes seemed to get a new gleam.

"Three fingers and a thumb!" answered Lynx coolly, as he watched the effect of his words on the young man.

Gold Grit almost bounded from his chair.

"Then the man was killed!" he cried.

"Murdered!" echoed Lucifer Lynx.

"They were afraid he would get well."

"Who were?"

"The pards of this tiger lair! There is one thing they want above all others, my boy."

"What is that?"

"Your life!"

"But Reckless Roy was their pard—their bully."

"But he stood between them and you. Don't you see?"

Gold Grit made no reply, but looked like a person thunderstruck into Lynx's face.

"This is a mystery to me," he said, at length, seeing that the detective was waiting for him to speak.

"I am not surprised," laughed the spotter. "I haven't been here long, but I know a good deal about men and matters in Thunder City. It is a wonder you were not forced to shoot Reckless Roy before now. He was always your enemy."

"Always," confirmed Gold Grit.

"There is another like him."

"In Thunder City?" exclaimed the youth.

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"Let me tell you of him anon," was the reply.

"I don't want this conversation prolonged here at this time. I am here in your interest. You must leave camp before it is filled with the news of Reckless Roy's death."

"That would be running from the tigers!" cried Gold Grit. "By my life! I will never do that! I told them after the duel that if Reckless died they would find me ready for trial, and they shall! Doctor, I value my word above all things. See! I am not unprepared for the worst if it comes!" And Gold Grit smiled as he displayed the butts of two revolvers sticking above his belt. "Why should I go, since, as you say, my shot did not send Reckless Roy out of the world?"

"Them men-tigers of the 'Divide' will listen to nothing, though I shall take pleasure in telling them that the life of the bully is not on your hands. Your resolve to remain here and fight it out must give way to policy. It is not cowardice to turn one's back for the time on men like those who run this camp. The moments are fleeting, boy. You must go!"

Lucifer Lynx saw the young man's lips meet with firmness.

He rose and leaned toward him with a steady look and his hand dropped firmly upon his shoulder.

"There's no two ways about it, Gold Grit. You must go! I say so!" he cried.

The last words were spoken in a tone that startled the young prospector.

"You?" he exclaimed. "What am I to you, Doctor Lynx?"

"No difference what," was the reply. "Get up and prepare for flight. The time has not come for you to be shot to pieces by the pistol-demons of Thunder City. If Flavia were here she would say 'Go,' and you know it."

"She would."

"And go you must!"

The hand of Lucifer Lynx seemed to lift Gold Grit from his chair, and almost before he knew it the young man was on his feet.

"You must go at once."

"Without seeing Flavia?" he asked, staring at Lynx.

"Yes."

He drew back the length of the detective's arm.

"You take a singular interest in me for a stranger!" he exclaimed. "I never saw you before the duel—"

"Fifty times before, but no more now!" was the interruption. "The worst mob Thunder City ever saw is liable to pounce upon you at any minute. It will be led by the prince of villains, Scar Chick, a man who wants your life. Now, come with me. No more questions, and no explanations."

Thus overruled by the determined man who became a deeper mystery as he talked, Gold Grit was hurried from the cabin like a man under a spell.

"Whither am I to go?" he asked half bewildered.

"To the mountains first. Circumstances will dictate the rest," was the answer. "I am going to leave you at the edge of the camp for a few minutes. I want to throw something into the teeth of the men-devils who run this ranch."

The young mine-hunter did not remonstrate against this resolve, but kept his thoughts to himself and was conducted to the end of the camp where the dark sides of the mountains rose before him.

"Wait for me here," said Lucifer Lynx, dropping the hand he had held the entire distance.

"One minute!" cried Gold Grit, turning upon him. "Let me tell you that you don't want to fool with the men back there."

Lucifer Lynx laughed.

"Don't I, my boy?" he exclaimed, a twinkle in the depths of his eyes. "I've had my share of adventure with men like them."

"Where?"

"Nearly everywhere. They're pretty much the same the world over—in the mountains and

the cities. I've seen them at their best!" and before Gold Grit could reply, the strange man had vanished and he was alone.

"That fellow is more than Doctor Lynx!" ejaculated the young proprietor. "He came to my side when I stood before the pards of Thunder City with Reckless Roy accounted dead on the dueling ground, and his words and manner told me that he was ready to fight for me then. I account him a man of mystery, but foolish for going back to face the mob that will hunt me when Thunder knows that Reckless Roy is dead. By my hopes of bliss! the first shot takes me back!"

But Gold Grit was not summoned back to the mountain camp, for, as the reader knows, Lucifer Lynx faced Scar Chick's mob without bloodshed, and afterward disappeared with the strange accusation he had flung into the desperadoes' faces.

Suddenly and without noise the detective reappeared at Gold Grit's side.

A smile was on his face.

"You heard the tiger cats, eh?" he cried, throwing a look toward Thunder City.

"Yes."

"Well, they know that one man believes that Reckless Roy was killed to-night."

"You told them?"

"I did."

"Where?"

"In front of Major Sphinx's shanty. The major and his new pard were lookers-on."

"The major and Ozark?"

"Not Ozark, but the fellow he has summoned from the seaboard," said Lynx, quickly.

In an instant Gold Grit's eyes were filled with a puzzled look.

"I did not know he had sent for any one!" he ejaculated.

"Aha! I did," was the response. "They call this new man the Spider in some places. I knew him on sight to-night, though I had to inspect him by a cabin lamp. He has been sent for to play deep with Ozark in one of the biggest games Major Sphinx ever started, and he is fertile when it comes to bonanza hands. We move on now, my boy. Somewhere during your hunt for the mountain mine, you have selected a home."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, it is natural. You don't live in Lightning Lay-out, for it is as unhealthy for you as Thunder City. How far are we from your retreat?"

"Not far, since you know I have one," answered Gold Grit, with a smile. "But I want to tell you that I am going back to Thunder City."

"Certainly; so am I!" said Lucifer Lynx, and the emphasis was quickly caught by the listener. "This flight does not exile you from the boss city of the 'Divide.' We are playing policy now. Show me the mountain home."

Gold Grit started at a rapid walk down the trail, that seemed to lead deeper and deeper into the mountains.

The clouds of the storm that had just ceased to rattle its fury upon Thunder City were separating here and there, and now and then the moonlight fell upon tree and mountain wall.

"I have not built a palace, doctor," suddenly exclaimed Gold Grit, wheeling upon the man he had guided some distance from the mountain city. "My retreat was ready for me when I came upon it, and I use it sometimes when I am in this part of the country. Ah! we are here now. Walk into my shanty!" And Gold Grit with a smile on his handsome face held open the door of a little cabin which he would hardly have found in the daytime.

Lucifer Lynx looked at the structure as he could see it in the uncertain light, and walked inside.

Gold Grit followed and found a tin lamp where he had evidently found it on former occasions, and in a little while the small interior of the place was illuminated.

"My forerunner was a good hand with his jackknife!" the young bonanza-hunter exclaimed. "There are several specimens of his work on the logs. They are all alike, though. Take this one for example."

As he spoke Gold Grit walked toward one of the walls with the lamp in his hand.

Lucifer Lynx was at his heels.

"Here it is!" exclaimed the young man.

On the log in front of the pair was a singular carving like a monogram, and under it the letters "Z. W."—all cut deeply into the wood.

The detective leaned forward with a cry he could not suppress.

"What is it?" asked Gold Grit.

Lucifer Lynx did not seem to hear the question.

His eyes were riveted upon the carving on the log, which to him was a startling revelation.

CHAPTER X.

A DEMAND FOR A LIFE.

WE go back to Thunder City.

It was time, as Ozark Oil informed Julian the Spider in front of Flavia's abode, that six strange men had entered the mountain diggings.

These men were stalwart, dark-faced fellows, who wore their pantaloons in their boots, and

whose mien told that they had invaded Thunder City for no idle purpose.

But what seemed to astonish the Spider most was that Ozark should seek him out and dare him to help him (Ozark) take the six unawares. The proposition seemed to send Julian's hand mechanically to his belt.

He had left Major Sphinx for the purpose of interviewing Flavia, but here, at the very door of her home, he was confronted by Ozark and twitted about his courage.

"This man calls me Devil Jule," said Julian, under his breath. "This shows that he knows what I have been. I thought he recognized me when he saw me at the major's a while ago, and yet this man and I are expected to become pards! I want to see Flavia above all things just now. I did not come here to fight the toughs of Lightning Lay-out unless they stood between us and our game."

Then he looked at Ozark Oll and asked:

"Where are these men?"

"They were holdin' a council o' war near Happy Hank's. We kin take 'em by surprise if they ar' thar yet. If you shoot as you used ter, Devil Jule, we'll be more than a match for ther big six."

"Why do you call me Devil Jule?" asked the Spider. "Don't you know that I came here as Julian Jayne?"

"Or as Richard Ragan, Jr., ov New York!" laughed Ozark. "That's the man I sent ther dispatch ter from Helena, an' ye'r ther feller what answered it in person. But I call you Devil Jule. Why, I knowed you as soon as I got my peepers on you. And Major Sphinx had arranged that we should be pards with his famous 'By Jove! ha, ha!' too!" And a smile broadened on Ozark's face.

Julian did not smile.

"We can't be pards, I'm afraid," he said.

"I rather think not, exceptin' in this tussle with ther galoots o' Lightnin' Lay-out. Ye'r goin' with me in this, ain't yer?"

"Yes!" exclaimed the Spider, and two revolvers left his belt at the same instant. "I am with you in this, Ozark. I want to tell you that Julian the Spider is still Devil Jule in more ways than one."

"Come along, then!" cried Ozark. "We want ter strike ther Lay-out pards before their council breaks up."

Julian threw a glance at the cabin to see that its beautiful inmate had not been disturbed, and the next minute he was walking away with Ozark Oll.

"I'll show this fellow that I am still famous for one thing," he muttered, with a dark side-glance at the man whose shoulder he touched. "I am not to be called Devil Jule here any more than I am to be dubbed Julian in New York. I'll turn on him after our brush with the Lay-out men, for, by Jupiter! I came here to run a game—not to be caught upon sight!"

Ozark Oll led his new pard some distance among the cabins of Thunder City.

The hour was not very late, and a light told the pair that Happy Hank's was still open and well supplied with patrons.

"Lightnin' Lay-out came over ther 'Divide' for business," whispered Ozark at Julian's ear. "I fancy ther they had a meetin' an' sent six o' ther best men on ther mission."

"Six men won't go back!" was the quick response.

"Not with a team like us ag'in' 'em! I left 'em holdin' a council over thar ag'in' Anacanda's shanty; they had their heads together an' war talkin' in whispers. But—"

"Hold!" interrupted Julian. "There's a man under the lamp over Happy Hank's door. By Jingo! ther's another. One—two—three!"

Ozark Oll had already turned, and his eyes caught sight of the three almost giant figures that displayed themselves before the door of the whisky den.

"Whar's ther rest?" involuntarily ejaculated the major's pard.

"They'll show up directly, perhaps."

With their fingers at the triggers of their revolvers, the two sports leaned forward and watched the three toughs with eager eyes.

"If they open that door they'll spread death an' destruction throughout ther saloon," said Ozark in low tones. "I don't want ter begin on three. I'm waitin' for ther hull six ter show up—then comes ther whirlwind."

The three men under the lamp remained motionless for some moments.

All at once one of the number took a step toward the door, and in a second it was wide open revealing the interior of the trap.

Happy Hank's establishment was filled at that moment with the men who, with Scar Chick at their head, had lately traversed the camp demanding the blood of Gold Grit for the death of Reckless Roy.

The failure to find the young prospector had not put them in the best of humor, and they had not assisted it by keeping away from Happy Hank's infamous liquors.

The opening of the door in this unexpected manner startled the men inside, and those who turned toward it caught sight of the three pards from Lightning Lay-out.

"Come!" cried Ozark throwing a look at

Julian as he started forward. "We want a dead band in the game ter be played at Hank's."

"Gents, you will stand whar ye ar'," rung out a voice, and the two men stopped and looked to the right.

"Ther other three!" cried Ozark Oll.

Julian the Spider did not speak.

Within six feet of them and plainly visible in the starlight that had followed the storm, were the missing pards of the rival camp!

Julian and Ozark were covered by revolvers behind which were the figures of three men their physical equals, and their match in coolness.

"What does this mean?" demanded Ozark.

"You ar' from Lightnin' Lay-out?"

"We ar'!"

"Three ov yer hev just entered Happy Hank's."

"An' three ar' hyer, as you see!" laughed the spokesman of the trio. "Ther Lay-out hes held a caucus. We ar' ther representatives o' thet caucus—six ov us. It war agreed by all present that a certain demand should be made on Thunder City."

"A demand?" echoed Ozark Oll. "Ov what nature is it?"

"We demand ther body ov ther bonanza galoot called Gold Grit!"

"Oho!" broke forth Major Sphinx's pard.

"You want ther young myth-hunter, eh?"

"We do."

"Then, he's crossed Lay-out in some manner."

"Never mind thet. We want the young chap."

"An' six o' you big men hev come ter Thunder after him?"

There was a sneer in Ozark's tones.

"We ar' here by ther decree o' ther caucus," was the answer.

"The demand is now being made at the saloon yonder by Satan Sam. Ther boy is hyer—has been hyer for a week. We know it!"

"Then you know more than we do," said Ozark.

"He is here under bond awaiting the result of Reckless Roy's wound."

"It has resulted," smiled Ozark with a look at Julian. "The man is dead, an' Gold Grit slipped away before ther pards could reach him. They'll tell ther other pards ther same thing down at Hank's. Gentlemen, ye've come too late."

The three men looked disappointed.

"Why do you want him?" asked Julian the Spider. "What is the young man that Lightning Lay-out should demand him?"

"We've got tired o' him trampin' ther 'Divide' for somethin' that has no existence," was the reply.

"Is that all?"

"No," and the lips of the speaker met firmly behind the little word. "Confound it! thar's two o' him!"

"What!" cried Ozark leaning toward the three.

"Thar's two o' him, I say," reiterated the tough. "You kin find men in Lay-out who'll swear thet only one o' 'em is flesh an' blood; but thar's two Gold Grits all the same. We want ther one thet's been waitin' byer a week on Reckless Roy's hurts."

It was plain to see that Julian the Spider was more than surprised by the singular announcement.

"You come too late to find the young prospector here," he said to the three. "He was here at sundown, but he is gone now. He left soon after Reckless Roy died."

"Did anybody help him away?"

"Yes—thet infernal doctor, Lucifer Lynx!" cried Ozark. "That's my opinion, anyhow. Don't you see that they've told yer pards ther same thing at Happy Hank's; they're at ther door again."

Once more under the lamp swinging above the door of Happy Hank's shanty stood the three men who had been seen to enter it a few minutes before.

As they stepped back they were followed by the men whom they had surprised inside.

"If Gold Grit is not here, of course we can't take him," suddenly said the most stalwart man of the three who faced the Thunder City pards before the saloon. "We didn't come here for a fight. We don't want the blood o' any citizen o' Thunder, now, but we want it distinctly understood that the old grudge is still good. We came for the young bonanza sharp, an' we go away with a standin' demand for him behind. He has been proscribed by Lightnin' Lay-out. He's in league with Satan, an' thar ar' two o' him if thar's a sun in ther sky. Our mission has failed because you have convinced us that Gold Grit isn't hyer. You say you want him for ther death of Reckless Roy. Our sentence war ther first one passed, an' we want Thunder City ter respect it."

"Which means that ef ther young galoot tumbles inter our hands, we ar' ter turn him over ter Lay-out?" asked Scar Chick.

"Yes."

"Then, by Jupiter!" Thunder City will continue ter be independent! She passes her own laws, an' carries out her own sentences."

"Yes."

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"Yes."

"Then, by Jupiter!" Thunder City will continue ter be independent! She passes her own laws, an' carries out her own sentences."

The three men stepped back, and the hand of Satan Sam went up.

"We don't take back a single word o' ther demand!" he exclaimed to the crowd in front of the saloon. "The young myth-hunter is ther property o' Lightning Lay-out by decree an' sentence! We are hyer ther night ter say for ther hull camp, 'Woe ter ther band that cheats ther Mountain Council!' If one man of Thunder City takes revenge for Reckless Roy, we will hold the whole camp for ther deed. That's ther voice of Lightnin' Lay-out, gentlemen! Come, boys, we go back empty-handed!"

The big sport's words had not ceased to astonish his auditors by their audacity when six men were seen walking slowly toward the confines of the camp.

"Hold on a minute!" cried Scar Chick springing forward with fire in his eyes. "You'll take over ther 'Divide' with yer a message from ther Thunder City seraphs."

The six men stopped and faced about, and for several minutes Scar Chick poured out sentence after sentence of the most terrible defiance.

The six bronze commissioners listened with smiles at their lips.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPIDER AND HIS WEB.

"THAT means war," ejaculated Julian the Spider, when Scar Chick got through, and the six men of Lightning Lay-out turned on their heels and marched silently away.

"War ter ther knife!" cried Ozark. "But it's no more than we've been havin' with them galoots ever since ther 'Divide' has been between us. Things had settled down o' late ter some extent, an' they took this plan ter get 'em back ter ther normal condition. They thought we wouldn't give Gold Grit up if we had 'im. It war only a game, Julian. Thar they go—ter report ter ther caucus they've blowed about, an' we didn't git ter take 'em unawares, eh? Some other time, my lizards ov Lay-out!" and Ozark Oll shook his big hand at the disappearing forms of Thunder City's enemies.

"I can go back to my work now," murmured the Spider. "I've gained some singular knowledge by the interruption, but there must be a mistake somewhere. Somebody has been deceived. There are not two Gold Grits. There can't be! I don't care what the men of Lay-out say. If they would swear to it on a mountain of Bibles they would be liars all the same. I know what I'm talking about," and he walked away with the mien of a man well-grounded in a certain belief.

Julian walked back to Flavia's little home. He wondered if the girl knew anything about the visit and departure of the six pards of the "Divide."

Major Sphinx, of course, was ignorant of the affair, but he would soon learn of it from Ozark if he was not told by some one else before he met his tool.

Julian reached the cabin without incident and this time he was not disturbed by Ozark at the door.

In response to his knock Flavia appeared at the portal and looked searchingly at him as he was revealed by her lamp.

A quiet smile grew on the girl's face as she noticed the major's clothes on Julian's frame, and all at once a look of satisfaction filled her eyes as if she had just thought of the storm.

"You don't know me. It is not strange!" exclaimed the Spider, breaking the spell of his presence. "I have just come to Thunder City. I was a storm-bird and for the time I look strange in borrowed plumage, the major's. You are Flavia, I believe?"

"That is what I am called," answered the girl.

"I want to see you," and then he added, "on business."

Flavia gave him another look.

"Are you and Major Sphinx friends?" she asked.

"We are."

The answer seemed to be passport enough to the young girl's abode, for she stepped back and held the door open.

Julian stepped inside and took off his hat, which action showed Flavia his wealth of black hair inclined to curl here and there in its abundance.

She could not help seeing that this stranger despite his ill-fitting clothes, was handsome. He was the picture of magnificent manhood, and Flavia blushed when she thought he caught her admiring him too closely.

"I come to you at the suggestion of no one," began the Spider, when he had fixed himself on a chair with the little table of the cabin partly between him and the girl. "My curiosity must be my excuse. Now let me proceed. You say they call you Flavia. What is your other name?"

The girl appeared to start at the question, but she soon smiled as she replied.

"It is only Flavia."

"But," said Julian, leaning slightly forward.

"All people have two names."

"If I ever had, one of them was lost long ago," exclaimed the girl.

"You came to Thunder City in a storm, I believe?"

"Yes. We were struck in the mountains by a hurricane. I don't know how I got upon the horse that carried me safely to this place."

"Who were with you?"

"Zeke Wildfoot and his wife."

"Who were they?"

"Not my parents—I am certain of that!" cried Flavia. "They raised me though, and always called me Flavia."

"Flavia Wildfoot?"

"No!" said the girl, quickly. "The woman often told me that there wasn't a drop of Wildfoot blood in me. We were on our way to San Francisco when the storm separated us forever. They found Zeke Wildfoot's wife dead under the wagon in a ravine after the storm, but Zeke himself they never found."

"No papers of any kind?"

Julian the Spider almost betrayed himself in the eagerness with which he waited for a reply.

"Oh, yes, they found a lot of old documents which Zeke Wildfoot must have carried in a box which I knew was in the wagon," she said.

"What ever became of those papers?"

"They brought them to me."

"Well?"

"Last winter they accidentally took fire."

An exclamation of bitter disappointment parted Julian's pale lips.

"And were destroyed?" he cried.

"Entirely destroyed!"

For several minutes the New York desperado sat upright and motionless in his chair, as if the girl's answer had taken his breath.

"Here is a beautiful go!" he muttered. "The proofs of a splendid bonanza vanish when I begin to feel them in my hands. The major certainly never heard of the burning of the papers. By Jove! I must get at this mystery somehow."

Then he looked at Flavia and went at it again.

"Didn't you examine the papers to see what they contained?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I read them several times as well as I could, but so much of them was in French that I never got great satisfaction from them."

"What were they?"

"Old deeds and a will; the latter was in French altogether."

"Of course it was," said Julian to himself, as he started slightly.

"But was there no name in any of the papers that impressed you?"

"No," replied Flavia, smiling. "Here and there I saw the name of Hiram Hartyn. I remember it only by its strangeness, nothing more."

The Spider settled back into his chair and seemed to drop into thought.

All at once his brow unclouded, and his eyes got a gleam that startled the girl in his presence.

"Did anybody ever see those papers while you had them?" he suddenly asked.

"No."

"Not even the young friend called Gold Grit?"

"I never thought them important enough to show them to him."

"Nor Major Sphinx?"

"I think he looked over them before they came into my possession."

"Then you know nothing about yourself?"

"Nothing more than what Zeke Wildfoot's wife cared to tell me, and that was next to nothing," smiled Flavia. "I guess I am right. I have never been anybody but Flavia. Are you hunting an heir like Gold Grit is hunting the lost bonanza?"

"No!" exclaimed Julian. "I happened to hear about your coming to Thunder City, and about the papers that were found between the mountain rocks. Naturally they excited me. I would like to have seen them, but as they were burned a year ago almost, I shall not have that pleasure."

Flavia now turned questioner, and so suddenly that Julian the Spider from the first became uneasy.

"Aren't you the man the major sent for some days ago?" she asked.

"I came from Helena to-night."

"But he sent for you?"

The persistence with which the beauty of the "Divide" pressed her point made Julian wince. Her deep eyes were fastened upon him, and seemed to look into the inmost depths of his soul.

"Well, yes; he sent for me!" he answered tartly, as if glad to get off with the simple truth.

"It took you a long while to get here. Does it take a person ten days to come from Helena?"

"N-no," stammered the Spider, with his eyes still upon her.

"You will pardon me—I thought not," said Flavia, with a smile.

"You were here when the men of Thunder City sought for Gold Grit after Reckless Roy's death?"

"Yes."

"They did not find the young mountain mine-

hunter!" exclaimed Flavia, brightening. "He gave them the slip."

"So it seems," said Julian.

"Are they looking for him yet?"

"No."

The Spider did not see fit to tell the girl about the demand made by the six men from Lightning Lay-out, so he contented himself with his monosyllabic reply.

"If Gold Grit keeps to the mountains, the tigers of Thunder City will never find him, but he will come back," and the girl's tones had a tinge of fear. "Do you know, sir, that Gold Grit did not kill Reckless Roy, although he shot him in a duel ten days ago?"

"I heard of the duel, but I know nothing about the man's death more than the accusation made by the man called Lucifer Lynx."

"What was that?"

"He stood before the pards of Thunder City in front of Major Sphinx's shanty and told them that the slayer of Reckless Roy was among them."

"It was true—every word of that accusation!" cried Flavia leaning suddenly forward and clutching Julian's lips. "I can go to Happy Hank's where they all are at this moment and pick out the man."

"You, girl?"

"Yes."

"Well, you don't want to do it," exclaimed Julian the Spider. "Why, your life wouldn't be worth an ounce of dust if you did that."

A smile passed over Flavia's face and her color brightened.

"Do you say I dare not?" she asked firmly.

"No—no! I say nothing of the kind! If you know who killed Reckless Roy, you want to keep the secret here in Thunder City. The truth is not wanted sometimes."

"Very well," said Flavia. "I'll keep it for the present, but if a certain event occurs, remember! I out with it cost what it may!"

Julian could not but admire the beauty of the girl as she closed this firm sentence.

"Fit to grace the grandest stage in the world!—fit to reign a queen where there are no beggars!" ejaculated Julian. "By the eternal heavens! I'll make this magnificent mountain diamond the stake of a big side game! I will get at the Wildfoot mystery as I can call it if the old papers did burn. The major knows nothing of this, neither does Ozark Oll, nor any one else. The secret is mine, and I'll make it a diamond field. I'll go back to the major and dream over this. We can play our original game together, but this new one I'll play myself. I wouldn't have stayed in New York for all its money. Lucifer Lynx is here, but what of him? I'll snuff him out at the first opportunity!"

Five minutes later Julian was going back to Major Sphinx's cabin.

His head for a time seemed in a whiel as if some dazzling prospect had completely turned it.

He opened the door and walked in. Major Sphinx was asleep in his chair at the table and Julian shook him till he yawned and opened his eyes drowsily.

"She's a daisy, ain't she?—worth her weight in gold! When we've worked up ther original bonanza, Julian, we kin take that magnificent creature and sell her for half a million. We kin, by Jove, ha, ha!" cried the Nabob.

CHAPTER XII.

OZARK OLL'S BIG CONTRACT.

"LOOKS ter me like the game's taken wings," remarked Ozark Oll in audible tones to himself as he walked toward his cabin after the departure of the six men of Lightning Lay-out. "The boy is gone, an' under ther wing o' Doctor Lynx, who came hyer fer a purpose, I'll bet my head. Them fellers back thar in Happy Hank's will swear ter hunt Gold Grit down, but what ov it? My opinion is thet ther young mine-sharp has given us ther slip fer good, an' Major Sphinx an' Julian kin hunt another game somewhere else."

These were Ozark Oll's opinions, and when he reached his cabin he made preparations for retiring. He had left at Happy Hank's the maddest crowd of men Thunder City had ever seen.

The escape of Gold Grit, the young prospector, and the demand and threat of the men of the rival camp over the "divide" had incensed Scar Chick and his pards to a degree almost beyond belief.

Happy Hank's place was a regular pandemonium, and while Ozark walked home the mad pards were forming themselves into a league whose oath was against Gold Grit and the man who was charged with helping him off—Lucifer Lynx.

The youth and his friend were to be dealt with on sight, and in spite of the demand of the "nest of liars" commonly called Lightning Lay-out.

Some of the men hinted that Flavia knew something about the flight, but Scar Chick himself came to the girl's rescue, and defended her in a manner that seemed to allay all suspicion.

Ozark did not expect to be disturbed that night, but he had not completed his preparations for bed when the cabin latch clicked, and he

saw, to his surprise, the figure of Major Sphinx before him.

"Here you are, by Jove! ha! ha!" exclaimed the Nabob of the "Divide" as he came forward with eyes aglow with eagerness. "I ought to be in bed myself, but I can't go till you've told me all about it."

"About what?" asked Ozark.

"The visit o' Lightning Lay-out. They wanted the boy, eh? You were there?"

"They wanted what they didn't get," smiled Ozark. "Major, don't you think thar's a poor chance for us in this game?"

Major Sphinx gave utterance to a cry of fear.

"My God! you don't think so, Ozark?" he exclaimed.

"Look at it," and the mountain tough drew back and kept silent for a second. "It'll be death for Gold Grit ter come back hyer, an' what will it be when ther pards o' Thunder City get on his trail?"

"Will they hunt him?"

Ozark laughed.

"You know them all major?" he said. "They've mapped out ther programme afore this at Happy Hank's. They'll set some kind o' trap for ther boys. They hold him accountable for Reckless Roy's death."

"You know what Lucifer Lynx said."

"That's catchin' at a straw, major," said Ozark quickly. "Kin you make Thunder City b'lieve a charge o' thet kind?"

"I'm afraid we couldn't," confessed Major Sphinx.

"It'd be worth a man's life ter try it," cried Ozark. "Lucifer Lynx may have told the truth in his charge, but who's ter prove it? He didn't say who killed Reckless Roy, only he said Gold Grit didn't. Major, if you build any hopes on that they'll tumble like a castle o' cards! Ef you don't intend ter give ther game up for a bad one—"

"By the eternal, I don't!" interrupted Major Sphinx, his eyes seeming to ignite as the words burst from his lips. "Remember that I've played it for years, for a long time in the dark, an' I don't intend to give it up now. I'm not powerless here. I have two of the best men on top o' ground at my back; I have by Jove! I have summoned from the east a man worth his weight in diamonds in a deep play like this one, and I already had his equal at my side?"

"Thanks for thar compliment," smiled Ozark awkwardly to the major.

"The boy is not the real stake we're playing for," the Nabob went on. "He only represents it, Ozark. Without him the game can't be won. But I've told you this before."

Ozark nodded.

"More than once, major, but that's as far as you ever got," he said.

"Then to prove it I'll go a little further," and Major Sphinx drew his chair closer to the expectant tough who seemed to be preparing himself for a revelation. "Gold Grit is more than a mere myth-hunter with a blank past," he went on. "He is, in fact, the representative of an idle million in New York City. It can't be touched without him, and he's got to recover his memory before he can touch it. He is the son of a man who was killed in his own house in New York several years ago by supposed burglars. The boy got a blow on the head at the time and lost his memory. For some months he was the inmate of an asylum, but he made his escape and disappeared."

"That boy has been my objective for years," continued Major Sphinx after a brief pause. "Don't you see, Ozark, that if we can get him in our hands and fetch him around carefully, as a distinguished doctor tells me can be done, we can get the whole fortune?"

"The New York one?"

"Why not?"

"It will fall into his hands."

"And then into ours!" exclaimed the major. "That is why I've been here watching Gold Grit month after month. I have discovered his identity to a certainty, and the plum was almost ready to drop into our lap when this unfortunate duel occurs! If I could have foreseen this, by Jove! I would have killed Reckless Roy myself! So they are going to hunt the young fellow, are they? Lightning Lay-out wants him, too, eh?"

"Between Thunder and Lay-out he is in a sweat for sartain," laughed Ozark, with no regard for the major's feelings. "What will your New York sharp be worth to you if his true character should be known on ther 'Divide'?"

Major Sphinx gave Ozark a startling look.

"When did you first meet Julian, major?" continued the tough.

Major Sphinx reflected.

"Seven years ago," he said, at length.

"Where?"

"In New York."

"He was fresh from ther mines, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Never told you that, as Devil Jule, he was one o' ther best-known an' most-wanted individual thar?"

"No."

"Never hinted that thar's a perpetual offer for his head from ther Line ter Santa Fe?"

"No."

"He's completely hoodwinked you," and

Ozark's eyes twinkled. "Now, major, I could spoil all his prospects hyer by brandin' him Devil Jule at Happy Hank's. This camp is made up o' men-tigers from everywhar, but all ov 'em know who Devil Jule war, an' why ther whole Wild West wants him. This is ther man you've taken ter run yer game through, major; this is the galoot you've summoned all ther way from New York to help you whar his neck ain't safe a minute if he war known. How do you like Julian the Spider, now?"

Major Sphinx, with widely-staring eyes sat like a person spellbound in his chair.

This was a revelation that struck like a thunderbolt, and the breath of the major went in gasps.

"By Jove! if this is the case we're on ther brink o' another volcano!" he exclaimed. "I'll post Julian and—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" ejaculated Ozark, leaning forward and clutching his wrist while he looked him steadily in the eye. "If you were to warn him you'd have to betray me. Julian must not know that I put you onto the Devil Jule business. His secret is safe here, for we are the only keepers. You expect Julian an' I to work together, but I can't make a team with him."

"It is policy that you should. Ozark, I feel the need of two such men. Without you the game is lost. For Heaven's sake, don't desert me now! I have counted on you through thick and thin. Forget that Julian was ever Devil Jule as you call him—"

"You might as well ask me to forget the infamous crimes that outlawed him."

"You have sworn to help me through."

"Yes, I did! I took an oath to serve you like a faithful slave!" cried Ozark. "But then, I did not know that the man you called the Spider was Devil Jule. I will not break that oath, major. You can still count on Ozark Oll."

Major Sphinx uttered a cry of joy.

"Then we shall win!" he exclaimed. "Neither Thunder City nor Lightning Lay-out shall deal with the young myth-hunter!"

"They shall not!" cried Ozark, firmly. "You will let me serve you without touching shoulders with this outlawed thug. My head for it, if the truth was known, ther police want him in New York."

Major Sphinx gave a violent start.

"That man is wanted, wherever he has been, but enough of him. I dismiss him with ther prophecy that ther right person will get him some day."

"After the game is played out I shall not care," was the reply. "But Julian will be useful to me till then. A cooler head than his never rested on human shoulders."

"There was another 'ust as cool in camp to-night."

"Whose was it?"

"Lucifer Lynx's."

"Aha! Doctor Lynx!" cried the major. "Julian knows him."

"I'll bet my soul he does!" laughed Ozark. "Julian knows them all. What if Lucifer Lynx knows Julian? That would not be so pleasant, eh, major?"

"I don't think it would," answered Major Sphinx with a shrug of the shoulders. "But Ozark, I want to send you on another mission."

"Ter Helena? Have you Spider number two you want ter summon from New York?"

The Nabob of Thunder City shook his head with a smile.

"You know the mountain trails like a favorite book," he went on. "You can see them at night, I believe, Ozark. Gold Grit must not be lost. With him goes the million! If he is, as I fear, in the hands of Lucifer Lynx, he must be found without fail. Ozark, I want you for this duty. You must go upon the trail at once. Remember that the sworn pards of Thunder will seek it if I can't keep 'em back. Lightning Lay-out may hunt the same trail. I am going to pit you against the whole lay-out, Ozark!"

A quiet smile was seen to come to the corners of the sport's mouth.

"What about Julian?" he asked.

"I have work for him here," was the answer.

"Aha! you think Flavia will draw somebody back!"

"I don't know. It is best to have a good dog on the watch; it is, by Jove, ha, ha!"

"Then keep the New York bloodhound here!" cried Ozark. "I don't want him with me. But remember this, major: if Thunder City discovers that the Spider is Devil Jule, you'll be without a dog in less than thirty minutes."

Ozark Oll left his chair amid the silence enforced by his declaration.

"When are you going?" asked the major.

"Now!"

"Then, luck go with you. Find the boy, keep him out o' the clutches o' the wolves o' the 'Divide,' an' find me the best paymaster in the world."

"I'll do it all, major!" and in a little while Ozark Oll was the only occupant of the cabin.

As the sun dropped behind the clustered cabins four men carried the body of Reckless Roy to a secluded spot on the mountain-side, and lowered it into a grave already made. There were other graves there; not one of the occurrants had died at peace with all mankind, and Reckless Roy was a proper person to be laid among them by the quartette of bronzed athletes who carried him thither.

Before the corpse of the bully was taken from the camp, more than twenty men gathered around it and swore to visit the blood of Reckless Roy upon the head of the person who had shed it.

It was a solemn oath taken in a solemn manner, with the crimson rays of the setting sun falling athwart the face of the dead.

Flavia saw the whole proceedings from the door of her little cabin, and Julian the Spider stood aloof and watched the ceremony with occasional glances at the girl whom his keen eyes had singled out.

"She told me last night that she could put her hand on the man who hustled Reckless Roy out of the world," said Julian to himself, under his breath. "I wonder what she thinks now, with all the pards of Thunder City swearing vengeance over the corpse? It must shake her faith in her belief, if not totally destroy it."

The sun was down below the horizon when the four pall-bearers and sextons came back from their solemn duty.

Ozark Oll was not in camp, and nobody but Major Sphinx knew that he had gone away on a new and exciting mission.

The major had all the confidence in the world in the man he had sent upon Gold Grit's trail.

Ozark had never failed him before, and the expressed resolve to find the young bonanza-hunter told the major that the game was by no means lost.

Julian had already made some familiar advances to the men of Thunder City; he had purchased free of Happy Hank's stock, and before dusk was on fair terms with the majority.

The Spider had an oily nature calculated to bring men to him, and he knew how to use it.

To Sear Chick and the pards he was a person who had known Major Sphinx before the major became a citizen of the "Divide," and being in Helena, he had "run over to spend a few days with an old friend."

This explanation seemed to satisfy the Thunder City pards, and Julian further installed himself in their graces by intimating that if there was any prospect of a brush with Lightning Lay-out, he would postpone his departure indefinitely.

Major Sphinx had regarded him covertly more than once since Ozark Oll's departure.

He wondered if Julian was Devil Jule, the much-wanted man of the Northwest, and he always concluded his speculations by saying he "did not believe it."

The day was a long one to Flavia.

The young girl wondered if Gold Grit would come back into the wolf's teeth because she was there, and when night stole over Thunder City and the new grave on the mountain-side, she began to fear that the youth would come.

"There is one way to keep him off!" exclaimed Flavia to herself. "And that is to go away myself. He has told me so often about his shanty in the mountains, that I believe I can find it even at night. Why not go? What keeps me here? The men who will plot against him if they do not hunt him, want him back here. I could throw a bomb in their midst, but when they had recovered they would laugh at me. I believe I am the only living person besides one who saw Reckless Roy die. The new man in the camp told me to keep the secret to myself, and I must do it unless— Ah! the time may come when I will have to throw it into the faces of the men-tigers of Thunder City. Till then I will keep it; till then it shall be my exclusive property. It is a weapon greater than the best revolver on the 'Red Divide.' I'll prove it some day if the worst comes!"

The more Flavia thought that her presence in the camp might bring Gold Grit back the more she became impressed with the desire to leave it. She looked about her and found she would have nothing to take away.

She resolved to go.

In a little while she stood in the doorway of the cabin, ready to say farewell.

Her life at Thunder City was to end.

There was one whose life seemed in danger if she remained, for the girl knew that Gold Grit would not leave her for good, even though it were worth his existence to come back to Thunder City.

During this time Julian was the central figure of a crowd of bronzed toughs at Happy Hank's. The Spider was improving his time, feeling his way, as it were, and getting ready for a play which his wits had already mapped out.

Therefore, nobody saw the man who came into camp from the southwest, a well-built man, aloof, with a quick gait, and eyes that seemed to see everything.

One of his eyes was in mourning, as if he had received a heavy blow upon it, and this gave a sour expression to his countenance. His face was covered with a thick, brown beard, and his

garments were not the rough ones of the mountain tough, nor those of the rich sport. They were a fair compromise between the two.

This man entered the camp and came along as Flavia stood in her door, about to say good-by to the little cabin.

She instinctively drew back at sight of him, but her movement seemed to call the stranger's attention aside, and the next moment he stood before her.

"Flavia!" he exclaimed leaning forward as his eyes twinkled with pleasure.

A thrill went through the girl.

"I am Bruce Bartlett for the present, lode-finder, magician, and everything in that line," the man went on before the astonished girl could catch her breath. "In the first place, he is safe, and where they won't find him. I am back here to play the game that brought me to this country. You must not be surprised at anything you see or hear. I want to see you after awhile and on business of the utmost importance."

"But I don't know you," exclaimed Flavia.

"I never heard of Bruce Bartlett—"

"No!" laughed the man. "Then let me mention the name of Lucifer Lynx!"

The beauty of the "Divide" could hardly suppress an exclamation of betrayal.

This man Lucifer Lynx, the person with whom, as the surgeon in charge of Reckless Roy, she had become familiar?

It could not be! The change was too great.

Flavia's look became a stare.

"I swear I am no one else," he continued.

"The pards of Thunder City shall be treated to some legerdemain equal to Heller's best, if I do say it myself. I can locate mines with the divining-rod and lift the biggest giant on the 'Divide' with a thread. It's all for a purpose, though, Flavia," he lowered his voice. "There is a foul crime to be avenged, and the perpetrators thrown into the hands of justice. I am, under this uninteresting disguise, Lucifer Lynx, the New York Detective!"

He stepped back as he finished and let Flavia look at him for a moment in the rich starlight.

"What do they say about me here?" he suddenly asked.

"They accuse you of taking Gold Grit away."

"And they have sworn against me?"

"Yes. Your life won't be worth a ruffle if they penetrate your mask."

"Perhaps not," laughed Lucifer Lynx. "I've been in a fix like this before, girl. In fact I rather like 'em! You want to stay where you are. Whatever happens you don't want to know me till I give a signal. Lucifer Lynx is now Bruce Bartlett, and the trail he started on a long while ago is before him now. Good-night!"

He touched his hat as he drew off and without more ado walked away from the girl.

"There are are keener men than he thinks in Thunder City!" exclaimed Flavia, following him with her look. "I will not go now. As I live, Lucifer Lynx, you will need a friend here before you are many hours older!"

The detective had already disappeared and Flavia went back into her little cabin, forced to remain by the presence of the unexpected man.

Of one thing she was now assured.

Gold Grit was safe in the mountains and did not intend to come back into the jaws of death.

Lucifer Lynx knew where to begin operations.

The camp was thoroughly familiar to him; his sojourn there of a week as Reckless Roy's doctor had made him thoroughly acquainted with it; he knew every cabin in it and its owner.

Five minutes after the interview with Flavia Major Sphinx was startled from a pleasant contemplation of the future by a rap at his door.

He got up with an expression of surprise, for such knocks were not in vogue on the "Divide," and opened the door cautiously.

"Hello!" cried the detective. "If I'm a judge I've located the king o' the ranch. By Jove! ain't you Major Sphinx? I've heard ov you everywhere—a royal gent with a heart like a hog'shead, an' a humor like old wine! I am Bruce Bartlett, the boss mine-finder of the world, and no infant in the field o' magic. Don't look as handsome as I did yesterday at this time. I fell airily over a mountain wall, and bruised a rock with my head. Shall we shake, major?"

The man was already in the cabin and his off-hand manner had carried the day to an extent which Major Sphinx could not resist.

"By Jove! I'm glad to know you, ha, ha!" cried the major, extending his hand. "It's a wonder you didn't lose your eye."

"Never mind the optic, major!" ejaculated the detective. "Better than my head. I'm famous for falling on the soft side o' stones, but let me show you something that didn't break."

At the same time Lucifer Lynx produced a flask from an inner pocket and held it between Major Sphinx and the lamp on the table.

The rich color of the beaded liquor in the flask set the Nabob's eyes atwinkle.

"It's Southern Califormy!" the detective went on. "It is forty years old if it's a day. Way,

CHAPTER XIII.

A DRAUGHT OF NECTAR.

THE next day witnessed the first funeral Thunder City had had for some time.

a pint o' it in a barrel o' Happy Hank's stuff would turn the whole into nectar."

Anticipation made the major nervous.

"You haven't lived till you've tasted that elysian dew!" continued Bruce Bartlett as we may call the spotter. "But I won't keep you in purgatory any longer. Help yourself, my dear major."

It is needless to say that the Nabob of the "Divide" stood not on the order of his action.

He reached out and caught the flask and with an ejaculation of triumph glued it to his lips.

Bruce Bartlett enjoyed the operation.

"Something else beside whisky will tickle your throat at the end of my trail, major," he exclaimed to himself, and then to convince Sphinx that all was right, he swallowed some of the liquor himself.

Major Sphinx shut his eyes and smacked his lips.

He was delighted.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOME STARTLING MAGIC.

"WHAT did you say you were?" asked Major Sphinx suddenly opening his eyes and looking into Bruce Bartlett's face.

"I'm a bonanza-locater and magician."

"On a tour, eh?"

"I'm always on that."

The major looked his visitor over from head to foot, not in a suspicious manner, however, but with an air of contempt.

"I've heard o' men like you, but never saw one before," he said.

"Not much wonder. There ain't a million of us in this country, big as it is," replied the detective with a smile. "If I had an audience I could convince you that I'm no traveling humbug."

"I'll get you one, by Jove, ha, ha!" exclaimed Major Sphinx getting up. "That's a crowd at Happy Hank's that'll like a little diversion after what has happened in Thunder City. Come with me. By the way you won't mind if I sample your paradise fluid again, eh?"

"Go ahead!"

This time Major Sphinx emptied the bottle without any sense of propriety and the magician picked it up.

"Wait!" he exclaimed, holding it up before the Nabob of the "Divide."

"This flask is a never-failing source of joy. I press it—thus! and it refills itself with delightful promptitude. Presto! it is full again! Have another draught of life, major!"

With a cry of astonishment Major Sphinx recoiled, his dilated eyes fixed on the flask which was full again, and which Bruce Bartlett was holding triumphantly before him.

"By Jove! you out-Heller the great Heller himself!" gasped the Nabob. "In Satan's name, how do you do that?"

Bruce Bartlett laughed.

"It is one of the simplest tricks imaginable, major!" he exclaimed. "You'd make an apt pupil if you could be induced to break away from Thunder City."

"I'm too clumsy!" said Sphinx, surveying his giant figure for a moment.

"But your hands are quick. Ha! you've played a trick on me already."

"I" ejaculated the major.

"Yes. I did not know I was meeting a rival in the field of magic. Your pocket conceals the results of your tricks. By Jove! we ought to travel together!"

With a half-insulted air Major Sphinx put his hand into the pocket indicated by the magician's glance, and then let slip a cry of amazement.

"Bring forth the goods, major!" laughed Bruce Bartlett, and the next moment the big Nabob drew from his own pocket the counterfeited of the magic flask.

His eyes seemed ready to start from his head; he blushed then lost color and looked from the bottle toward the man before him.

"It's a trick! it is magic, by Jove, ha, ha!" he suddenly laughed. "You're a nugget!"

"You can keep the prize!" said the magician, and the major was again delighted.

"Now I'll see the audience you spoke of awhile ago," Bartlett continued. "I don't pretend to be far up in magic, but I know a few tricks that amuse and instruct. Off we are, eh, major?"

The following minute the two men were walking through the starlight toward Happy Hank's where Major Sphinx expected to introduce the stranger to the assembled grit and good looks of the mountain camp.

More than once he looked closely at him during the walk.

"He could keep Thunder City in good spirits a year, for I'll bet my head he has a thousand tricks of magic at his command," mentally ejaculated the Nabob. "I'm right glad he dropped in when he did. Maybe he'll take their minis off o' Gold Grit, and give the boy a breathin' spell."

Bruce Bartlett was not inclined to be silent during the walks to the saloon.

He talked incessantly, now about finding mines by magic, now about some tricks played

in various gold camps. He jumped from subject to subject in a manner that almost dazed the major and led him to exclaim:

"He's a hummer when he's wound up, ain't he?"

Happy Hank's nightly "court" was still in session when the pair reached the place, and without ceremony the major opened the door and stepped inside.

A shout of hilarious welcome greeted him at once, but the next moment the crowd saw the man at Major Sphinx's heels and grew quiet.

A stranger in Thunder City at that time was the unexpected.

"Gents, this is Mr. Bruce Bartlett, professor o' magic and the devil knows what else!" cried the major waving his hand with profuse ceremony toward the man at his side. "Though I haven't seen much of 'im, I kin recommend him as a hummer from 'way back."

The detective caught the top of his somewhat peaked hat between thumb and finger and threw it toward the rafter where it began to spin like a magic plate.

"I'm delighted to greet you gentlemen," he said straightening from a bow as the hat dropped back upon his head. "I have been correctly introduced as far as my name's concerned. I am Bruce Bartlett, and I sometimes take a turn in magic. You are all here, I see, and I will first give you a draught of nectar from the flask of the gods!"

"He's got it—he has, by Jove!" exclaimed the crowd. "This man beats all the wizards that ever spun a hat!"

The detective looked at the astonished man behind the counter.

"Glasses only, all you've got," he ordered in a low voice, and the pards of the "Divide" waited breathless to see what was to happen next.

In a little while twenty-five not very clean glasses were arranged side by side on the counter.

Bruce Bartlett stepped forward and drew the magic flask from an inner pocket.

"Gentlemen, permit me to fill your glasses with ambrosia," he cried.

"Out o' that one bottle?" exclaimed several members of the crowd in unison.

There was a sudden movement toward the bar and a craning of necks forward, and the next moment Bruce Bartlett was filling the end glass.

A silence akin to that of death pervaded the place, and the only movement apparent was that made by the hand of the magician as it carried the magic flask from glass to glass.

There were two men in the crowd who watched the man more than his work.

These were Scar Chick, the leader of the Thunder City pards, and Julian the Spider.

Bruce Bartlett underwent a searching scrutiny by these men: they had the keenest of eyes and the best of reasons for discovering his true character, and woe to him if behind the clever disguise they should see Lucifer Lynx.

But nothing occurred to break the spell of magic.

The never-failing flask filled all the glasses, and seemed as full at the last one as when it began.

It was magic, indeed!

Several exclamations of wonder greeted the accomplishment of the trick.

The detective-magician stepped back and waved his hand toward the counter.

"Take your nectar, gentlemen, with the professor's compliments," he exclaimed. "My distinguished friend, the major here, will certify that I don't distill poison."

"Waltz forward, boys!" cried Major Sphinx, as he set the example himself. "It's almighty seldom that a travelin' nectar press gets this way."

For the next few moments twenty-five glasses were being eagerly emptied of their contents, and click! click! click! they came back to the counter.

"That man is an adept," said Julian to himself. "But is it more than a coincidence that we should be in Thunder City at the same time? I wonder what Scar Chick thinks of him?"

The boss of the gold camp was eyeing Bruce Bartlett as closely as ever, but the magic just displayed had astonished him.

"We'd like ter hev yer hyer all ther time, professor!" broke out a gaunt fellow, who smacked his lips over the free drink he had just indulged in. "Let's swar 'im in, boys, an' keep the flask ter ourselves."

The bronze crowd laughed at the proposition, but there were some, the speaker among them, who treated it seriously.

"Give 'em suthin' else," whispered Major Sphinx, at the magician's elbow. "You've got this crowd in tow already. Show 'em suthin' else as good as the flask trick."

A peculiar smile appeared at the corners of Bruce Bartlett's mouth.

"The major here wants a little further diversion, gentlemen," he said, stepping free of the crowd. "You see here a simple wand," and he produced an eight sided stick about nine inches long and beautifully polished.

"This is the famous blood-rod," he went on,

making several swift passes with the stick before the silent crowd. "It was given to me by an East Indian magician. It is a solid piece of wood, yet it sweats blood when it is grasped by anybody who has committed any crime which has never been brought to light. I don't think it worth while testing it among you, gentlemen. I have too high an opinion of your honor; but I merely produce the wand to exhibit it as one of the curiosities of the world."

Having said this, the magician-detective was about to transfer the octagon stick back to his pocket when there was an eager movement on the part of the audience.

"By Jupiter! we'd like ter see thet stick tried!" exclaimed several.

Bruce Bartlett's hand stopped at the edge of his pocket.

"The blood-rod is called for!" he said in a stage voice. "If there is a universal demand for it—"

"Give it a trial!"

"We're all innocents hyer!"

"Send yer rod on its rounds, professor!"

The detective seemed to acquiesce in the general demand, and turning to the major, he requested him to form the pards along the wall of the saloon.

"Everybody!" was the general cry. "This is a free show!" and the bronze toughs began to arrange themselves with expectancy and merriment in their eyes.

"Come!" said Scar Chick to Julian the Spider.

"We want ter humor ther boys. That stick won't bleed," and Bruce Bartlett saw the two men station themselves side by side against the logs.

Happy Hank was the only person not in the line, and he leaned over his counter with eyes aglaze with wonder.

The detective placed himself before the waiting toughs.

"You want to inspect the wand first," he said, handing the stick to the first man. "See that it is solid wood—no humbug. It bleeds in the hands of those whose secret blood-shedding is yet hidden."

The stick went from man to man. Some took it charily, others seized it with eagerness and pressed it with all their might.

"Now for the test!" exclaimed the magician, receiving the wand back. "I place it in person in the hand of each man. *Soo ghulah ara-goom! Presto! here we go!*"

Each man was requested to hold the wand a moment in his hand before giving it back to the magician.

It went down the line slowly, and was eyed with much curiosity.

All at once twenty men uttered a cry of astonishment, and leaned toward a common center.

Drops of red were oozing from one end of the wand, and were falling to the floor.

And Julian the Spider was holding the stick! The bronzed men were thunderstruck.

"It's only a trick, gents!" laughed the detective, coming to Julian's rescue, for the Spider was almost colorless, and greatly embarrassed. "I take it from this gent's hand, wipe off the blood, and start it on again—thus! Ah! who's the next tester. My friend, the major. Innocent as a babe, pure as a dew-drop! Presto! here we are, major!"

Major Sphinx seemed to shrink when the magic wand was put into his hand.

"Hang me if I give it ther grip Julian did!" he mentally exclaimed. "I'll just close on it, that's all!"

"Jupiter! Look, major! It's a-droppin' on yer boot!"

Major Sphinx looked at the wand and lost color.

"Great Jericho! the infernal thing is a lie!" he cried. "There! take yer blood-stick, Bruce Bartlett. The man who says I ever committed a secret crime lies from the ground up! I, a criminal? It is a joke sure enough, by Jove! Ha! ha!"

And the stick, lying on the floor at the magician's feet, was red at one end.

"That ends it," muttered Julian. "I've got enough of this charlatan for to night!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE WARNING HAND.

THE test of the blood-rod was the concluding trick in magic for the night, and the meeting at Happy Hank's broke up shortly after.

Bruce Bartlett was offered lodgings by Anaconda Alf, whose cabin was the one in Thunder City always open to strangers, and not long after the scenes at the saloon he was the shanty's guest.

It was evident that the pards of the "Divide" had not got enough of magic, and the detective's last words ere he left them were a promise that he would not hurry himself out of the camp.

It was just what Lucifer Lynx wanted—an excuse for sojourning awhile at Thunder City—and his eyes snapped ere he fell asleep at thought of his success.

Major Sphinx still exhibited signs of the late shock when he plunged into his cabin and threw himself into a chair.

"Devilish queer if it was a trick!" he ejacu-

lated. "Never had anything take me below the belt like that. It took Julian the same way, too, but it didn't knock him off his pins as it did me. Mebbe he was lookin' for something o' the kind, though. By Jove, I wasn't!"

"I should say not, from the way you took it!"

Major Sphinx started, as if the blood-rod had been thrust unexpectedly into his hands again.

The door had opened and Julian stood before him.

"What do the boys say?" asked the major.

"They say you must have killed a dozen men, from your flare-up."

"Not! Do they say that?"

"They do."

Major Sphinx lost color, but a smile of assumed fearlessness overspread his face.

"It served you the same trick, Julian!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, but you see it didn't throw me off the pedestal. I didn't get hot under the collar and say that the person who said I ever took a human life was a liar from the ground up. Oh, no! Major, we've got to put up with these little annoyances."

"Little annoyances?" flashed the Nabob.

"That blood-rod business is next door to making a charge o' murder."

Julian leaned forward and showed his teeth in a grin that seemed to transform his handsome countenance into one of devilish malignity.

"When did you get so good, my dear major?" he laughed. "Is this the effect of the contents of the magic flask? Oh, no! you never took a life! Sweet saint, of Thunder City, you wouldn't kill a hungry bear that charged you. Were you never in New York? They say we renew ourselves every seven years, but it hasn't been seven yet! Look here! it'll do to wear white in a crowd and o' such an occasion as we've just had; but before me, major, you don't want to take off your true clothes."

"Pardon me, Julian. But hang the twisted luck! I hardly know what I say."

"Scared yet, eh?" grinned the Spider. "If it is this now, what will it be when the crisis comes? You want to get out o' here if you can't stand fire. This is a game for a million, and you don't want to lose sight of it, either."

"Not for a moment," said the major, firmly.

"Not for a moment! I'm going to bed now, and if you watch me you'll see that I sleep like a child despite the blood-rod and the charlatan who brought it to camp. He captured the pards, anyh w."

"Confound him! I'll see that he doesn't loaf in Thunder long."

"What'll you do?"

"Give him a hint to-morrow that we kin get along without him."

"Mebbe you'd better not," smiled Julian, who seemed to enjoy the major's desire to get rid of the visitor. "He may pull some new fangled magic on you. Give him a polar shoulder and he'll go away the quicker. My opinion is, major, that you don't want to cross the galoot with the bogus blood-rod."

Major Sphinx muttered something about frauds and saw Julian throw himself upon one of the two cots in the cabin.

"I'd like to hear from Ozark," he murmured.

"If he finds the young bonanza sharp, I'll get away from here as soon as possible. I profess to have courage, but by Jove! I can't stand sticks that bleed when you touch 'em, trick or no trick. Why didn't it bleed when others took it? And how would it know any thing about that New York affair?"

The more the major thought of Bruce Bartlett's magic, the deeper grew the mystery, and Julian was fast asleep, while with sleepless lids he leaned back in his chair between the Spider and the lamp, and tried to fathom the puzzle.

Meantime, in another part of the camp a tall man with a bright scar on his cheek, leaned upon a rough table and looked into the face of another man who had no scar.

"By the jumpin' jingo! we don't want a man like him hyer!" grated the scarred man, who was Scar Chick. "He's in yer shanty, I b'lieve!"

"Yes, I gave him a corner thar. Nobo'y else offered him one, though he kind o' caught the boys by his show."

"What did you think o' him, Anaconda?"

"Kinder slick with his hands."

"Too confounded slick!—too slick to be wanted in Thunder City. What do you think he is?"

"A trampin' magic sharp, and mebbe a card-flipper."

"No more than that, Anaconda?"

Anaconda Alf shook his head.

"Has it occurred to you that he may be a spy?"

"Him?—that man with the never empty bottle?" ejaculated Anaconda Alf, starting back.

"Yes," said Scar Chick, firmly.

"I've never accused him o' bein' that. A spy for what?"

"For the nest o' liars over the 'Divide'—for Lightning Lay-out!"

The charge seemed to take Anaconda's breath, and he did not recover for a minute.

"You never got that far in your thoughts, I presume," continued Scar Chick.

"It never entered my head," was the reply.

"Well, when you go home, just lean over Bruce Bartlett, if he's asleep, an' say, 'How's Lightnin' Lay-out?' My head for it that he'll jump up as if a rattler had hissed under him. Just try that, Anaconda."

The old sport gave Scar Chick no assurance that he would do anything of the kind.

"We don't want any Lay-out spies hyer!" the second desperado went on. "We saw six o' their galoots hyer not long ago, an' they went off more'n half-believin' that Gold Grit ar' hyer. Hence the presence o' this magic sharp in Thunder City."

There was no man who hated Lightning Lay-out and its citizens more than Anaconda Alf, but he could not bring himself to the belief that the man in his cabin was a spy for that neighborhood.

"I am goin' ter trip him to-morrow!" Scar Chick suddenly went on.

"Yer ar'?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Leave that ter me. We let a doctor stay hyer a week an' what did he do?—ran off with the young galoot who killed Reckless Roy! This Lucifer Lynx was playin' a double game o' some kind. I would hev got enter it if he had stayed; but ther sudden death o' Roy hurried him off. Wait till to-morrow an' see my trick."

"Mebbe he'll meet it with magic," ejaculated Anaconda Alf, with a grin.

"Not my trick!" laughed Scar Chick. "If it doesn't show him up as a Lay-out spy, it'll open him in his true character. I'm goin' ter keep Thunder City clean. Major Sphinx got that boy respited when we had a right ter his neck, but such a thing kin never happen hyer again! I don't take very well ter ther man who is now at ther major's shanty, but he isn't half as dangerous as the snake that's crawled into yours!"

Anaconda Alf walked reflectively homeward a few minutes after the interview with Scar Chick.

"This man a spy from Lightnin' Lay-out?" he muttered. "If he is, by Jupiter! he shouldn't see daylight! I looked 'im over from head to foot, viewed him from all sides, but hang me, if I could see anything double about him. For once Scar Chick has barked up the wrong tree, but," after a thoughtful pause, "if he turns out a double-dealer, I'll be ready to tie the knot myself."

A lamp, with a shade on one side, was burning on Anaconda's table when he reached his cabin.

The Thunder City sport slipped it around so that the light fell upon the figure of a man lying against the logs of the cabin.

Anaconda Alf leaned forward with breathless eagerness and fixed his eyes on the person who had furnished the mountain toughs with some startling amusement at Happy Hank's.

Unconscious of the close inspection, Bruce Bartlett, or Lucifer Lynx, was sound asleep, the hairs of his dark beard shining in the light, and his nimble fingers at rest.

"I'm not goin' ter b'lieve it till I see the result o' Scar Chick's trick!" mentally ejaculated Anaconda Alf. "He doesn't look like a spy, his jib ain't cut that way. If he should be that kind o' person, though, Jehu! his life ain't worth a pine burr whar he is!"

The sport drew back and took a chair at the little table.

Large of heart, he had given up the only bed in the shanty, and one of his singular customs on such an occasion was to sleep in his chair with his face framed in his arms on the table.

Anaconda Alf turned the lamp low but did not put it out, then he drew the chair closer to the table, and with a final glance at his motionless guest assumed his favorite position.

But somehow or other sleep did not come to him.

Perhaps the scenes at Happy Hank's kept him awake and restless. Every time he raised his head he looked at Bruce Bartlett.

The man had not moved.

All at once Anaconda Alf started forward with dilated eyes.

"More magic, by Jove!" he ejaculated, and then in a quiver he saw a sight that thrilled him.

Just over Bruce Bartlett's bosom and between two logs appeared a slender white hand, and in it, between finger and thumb, was a bit of folded paper!

"Scar Chick must be right, but I'll see!" murmured the startled sport. "Thar's only one hand like that in Thunder City, but my God! does she know this man?"

The next moment Anaconda Alf's body went forward without the semblance of noise, and his big hand stole toward the white one poised above the magician-detective.

In an instant he had caught the paper delicately, and it was his!

Anaconda Alf could hardly suppress an ejaculation of eager joy, nor wait until the hand was withdrawn as if it had accomplished its owner's purpose.

After an interval of silence during which he

heard his heart, the sport of Thunder City bent over the table.

Eagerly his fingers unfolded the paper and the following moment he had mastered the two brief sentences it contained:

"They are going to 'try' you to-morrow. Beware!"

There was no signature to this warning.

Anaconda Alf ground his teeth and locked at his guest.

"This is one warnin' you didn't get my magic sharp!" he growled, in triumph.

CHAPTER XVI.

FOUND OUT.

ANACONDA ALF did not see the person by whom the warning note was brought to his cabin.

The hand was enough for him.

He knew by it that the warning was Flavia's work, and he did not quit his shanty to see the beauty of the "Divide" glide back to her home, believing that she had put Lucifer Lynx on his guard.

"It was fortunate that I overheard Scar Chick and Anaconda to-night!" the young girl ejaculated, when the walls of her abode inclosed her once more. "They will not get to play the unma-king trick to-morrow, for he is now prepared for them. Forewarned is forearmed. Ah! Scar Chick, you will find Lucifer Lynx too much for you!"

Thus thought Flavia as her eyes glowed with hope and courage, whereas every vestige of color would have fled her cheeks if she had known that the paper thrust between the logs had fallen into Anaconda's hands.

It was destined to be a long night for the girl, but the day came at last, and she cast an anxious glance toward Anaconda's shanty.

"I wonder when Scar Chick will make the test?" she mentally exclaimed. "Will he do it privately, or before the whole camp?"

The morning of the long day wore off and Flavia saw the sun sinking once more toward the West.

Why did Scar Chick delay? Had he changed his mind?

Bruce Bartlett did not hold himself aloof from the Thunder City pards, but mingled freely with them, and performed a few simple tricks in magic that held him in their good esteem.

"Something has occurred!" cried Flavia, as the sun went down. "Scar Chick has altered his intention."

The girl was wrong.

All day Anaconda Alf had kept to himself the success of his adroit trick on Flavia, and as the girl did not get to speak to Bruce Bartlett, she believed that the warning had reached him, and that he was on his guard.

It was one of the strangest days Thunder City had ever experienced.

Major Sphinx avoided the magician, or when he saw him, gave him angry looks that would have killed if he (the major) could have given them that power.

He had no desire to encounter the man who had performed the blood-rod trick, and taken all the color from his cheeks; and he was wishing that something would turn up by which the unwelcome magician would be forced to leave camp.

More than once Flavia went to her door in the growing dusk to get a glimpse of the situation.

The strange silence appeared to her as the calm before the storm.

"Hello!" suddenly exclaimed a man who came round the corner of her cabin during one of her vigils. "I want ter see you, Flavia."

The girl turned and saw Anaconda Alf.

"Come in," she said, drawing back, and as the sport crossed the step he shut the door carefully and looked to see whether he and Flavia were alone.

"What is it?" asked Flavia, seeing by the man's demeanor that something important had brought him to the cabin.

Anaconda Alf darted forward and caught her wrist.

"What did you mean last night, Flavia?" he inquired.

The girl started and lost color despite her resolve to keep cool.

"What do you mean now?" she exclaimed.

One of Anaconda's hands dived into a pocket and produced a piece of paper which he thrust into the girl's face.

"You fetched this ter my shanty last night," continued the tough.

Flavia was silent.

"You first found out whar the demon trickster war sleepin', then you unchinked a little, an' got yer hand between the logs. Girl, this paper never fell inter Bruce Bartlett's hand!"

A slight cry was Flavia's response.

"It dropped inter a trap I set for it on the spur o' the moment," Anaconda Alf went on with a smile for the success of the past night. "Flavia, do you know what Thunder City would say if it found out yer work? That man is not Bruce Bartlett. You know him, an' so you try ter warn him."

For a moment the girl seemed to succumb to the accusing look that darted from Anaconda's

eyes, but all at once she leaned toward him with resolution uppermost in her own.

"I did take that paper to your cabin!" she exclaimed boldly. "I thought I had delivered it to the magician—not to you. I overheard Scar Chick talking to you in his cabin last night."

The brows of the bronzed sport grew dark. "Eavesdroppin' is death in Thunder City. That's one o' the iron-clad laws o' the 'Divide!'" he said.

"I know it, but I could not help committing the crime, if crime it is," was the reply. "You can report me if you wish."

"Me report you, Flavia?" exclaimed Anaconda. "If you wait for that event you'll hear Gabriel's trump along ther 'Red Divide.' But you must tell me the truth. I want ter know who that man is."

"Let Scar Chick's test determine that, if it can," ejaculated Flavia. "He has not given it up, has he?"

"No. It is to be made within the coming hour."

"What is it to be?"

"That is locked in Scar Chick's bosom. That man is not what he pretends ter be—a prince o' tricks."

"Why not? You saw him at work last night?"

"I did, an' he's a dandy, too. But I know that some big business brought him hyar. Scar Chick calls him a spy from Lightnin' Lay-out. He is not that?"

"No!" and the girl answered without thinking.

"Aha! I thought so!" cried Anaconda. "I am your friend, Flavia; have always been. You can't afford to help a man who comes hyar for no good ter the camp. More men than Scar Chick have been watchin' him all day. Major Sphinx's friend Julian has had an eye on him ever since he came, so has the major who got white over a little trick last night. Don't you see the man is in a web? He'll have ter declare himself. Scar Chick never fails when he undertakes a job. Now, Flavia, we come down ter business. Who is that man?"

Anaconda Alf was determined not to take anything unsatisfactory for a reply. His piercing black eyes were fastened on Flavia, and she could not throw off their spell.

A sudden thought came to the girl's rescue.

"You are my friend, you say, Anaconda Alf?" she suddenly exclaimed.

"I've always been that."

"Then I'm going to trust you."

The sport drew back.

"Not with any secret that will make me break my allegiance ter Thunder City!" he cried. "If that man is our enemy I won't promise ter keep anything you tell me, girl."

"He is not Thunder City's foe," was the quick response. "He has been misjudged all along. He has a mission to perform, and the discharge of it brings him here."

"A detective, eh?" cried Anaconda Alf.

"Yes."

Flavia drew back a pace to see how the mountain tough took the answer.

"By Jupiter! we don't like them trail dogs!" he said through his teeth. "Thar's a clause ag'in' them in the laws Major Sphinx drew up for Thunder City! We don't allow 'em hyar, Flavia!"

"But that does not keep them back," remarked the girl with a smile.

"Something else will!" grated Anaconda. "A detective, eh? What is he after?"

"The perpetrators of a dastardly crime."

"Ar' they hyer?"

Flavia seemed to hesitate a moment.

"He thinks they are," she said firmly.

The next question was to have been expected—

"Who ar' they?"

This time the girl shook her head.

"You will have to ask him, Anaconda. These detectives generally keep their own secrets."

"This one may have ter divulge his!" flashed the sport. "A man stands a poor show for success hyer with all Thunder City ag'in' him! It will be that, for a thousand, if Bruce Bartlett is what you call him. His blood-rod sweat last night for two men. Are they the ones he wants?"

"Who were they?"

"Major Sphinx an' his friend Julian."

"I do not know."

"It looks that way!" exclaimed Anaconda reflectively. "I can see that the major an' Julian war acquainted long before Julian came hyer. If I thought they war the ones he wants I'd—"

Anaconda Alf broke his own sentence and Flavia waited in breathless impatience for him to proceed.

"No. I don't think it'd be fair!" he suddenly went on. "I don't like old 'By Jove, ha, ha,' any too well; but he's kinder identified with Thunder City, an' I don't want one o' these detective sharps ter play a bluff game on ther 'Divide.' I don't like 'em, I say, girl."

"Give this one a chance," cried Flavia, springing toward Anaconda Alf. "My word for it, he will take none but the right persons. He doesn't want you."

"Of course not."

"You don't want to shield the guilty?"

"Not much! One o' the boys made a queer remark ter-day about the slight-o'-hand sharp."

"Well?"

"He says the one eye that is natural looks like Doctor Lynx's."

Flavia started and immediately wondered if the sport had seen her.

"I'm not much of a judge of eyes," continued Anaconda, "but the man what made the remark claims ter be up in the science. If the camp thought he war Lucifer Lynx who run Gold Grit off after Reckless Roy's death, all creation couldn't save him."

Flavia said nothing for a moment. The crisis had come, and the life of the cool detective trembled in the balances.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, looking anxiously into the tall sport's face.

"About the detective now in camp?"

"Yes."

"Is he your friend, Flavia?"

"He is!" cried the girl, eagerly.

"How long has he been such?"

"Not long, but he is my friend, all the same."

"Then, I'll let things take their course," was the reply. "He doesn't want me; I'm sure o' that. If he wants Julian, I don't keer a snap; but I'm still a friend o' ther major's. Ozark isn't hyer. He's off on a mission—gone ter hunt Gold Grit, I expect!"

"Is that true?" cried Flavia.

"I'm tolerably certain of it; but let that go. I won't give your friend away, but Scar Chick is goin' ter have his test. If he ain't Lightnin' Lay-out's spy, he may come out o' the ordeal with illyin' colors; but it may take off his mask, all the same. It's 'most time now. I've an idea that Scar Chick ar' goin' ter apply the test in public. Good-by, Flavia. You don't want ter be around. Your presence might lessen his chances."

Anaconda Alf drew back and left before the girl could hold him longer.

"Her friend an' a detective!" he muttered beyond the cabin. "I'll bet my head the blood-stick told the truth last night. But he can't take ther major off without a fight. Sphinx is one o' ther permanent fixtures of Thunder City."

Anaconda Alf walked rapidly away until a man stepping from a cabin, caught him by the arm.

"I've been waiting for you, Anaconda. I've got everything ready ter trip ther spy!" he cried.

The man was Scar Chick.

CHAPTER XVII.

SEVEN DEVILS.

"If everything in Thunder City was ready to trip the spy," certain events that demand our attention were transpiring in the mountains.

Ozark Oil was loyal to Major Sphinx if he did refuse to serve with Julian the Spider, and when he left the mountain camp commissioned to find Gold Grit he intended to perform his work to the letter.

A keen trailer, perfectly fearless and courageous, the buckskin sport was soon lost among the trails beyond Thunder City.

Meantime the youth so much wanted by Major Sphinx and by the pards of the "Divide" as well, had promised Lucifer Lynx that he would not venture back without the detective's orders.

We left the twain, as the reader will recollect, in the old cabin whose logs bore the strange carving which had astounded the detective.

Lucifer Lynx, as Bruce Bartlett, had come back to the danger point, but where was Gold Grit?

If the reader could have approached the cabin about the time our last events were occurring in Thunder City, he would have seen the object of search standing in the door. The position of the cabin breathed seclusion.

No broad trails led to it, and Gold Grit knew how to reach it by different ways.

The young mine-hunter had found it by accident, and as it seemed to serve his purpose, he had adopted it as a secret resting-place after long trails for the lost bonanza.

Lucifer Lynx had gone back to Thunder City against Gold Grit's wishes.

The man was still a mystery to the youth, and refused to tell why he would return to the place where his life would not be worth a straw if he were discovered.

Gold Grit had told the detective all he knew about himself, which was not much, for the strange blank in his memory was to him an impenetrable puzzle.

"I don't know where this will end!" he ejaculated, while he stood in the doorway of the hidden cabin with the shadows of rock and tree falling around him. "One thing I do know, and that is that I have fled like a coward from a lot of men who accuse me of a crime of which I am innocent. Reckless Roy did not die by the wound I gave him in the duel he forced upon me. Lucifer Lynx tells me that there were finger-marks on Roy's throat when he found him dead in his cabin, but yet he induces me to fly. I hate myself for that act. I fled without say-

ing 'good-by' to Flavia. I am a fugitive, with no crime on my hands. If Lucifer Lynx were here now, I would take back my promise and go to camp and dare the toughs there to do their worst!"

These words heightened the color in Gold Grit's face; they made him shut his hands in anger, and he threw a longing look up the mountain.

That mountain was between him and Thunder City; he looked like he would brush it away, and go back to Scar Chick and his merciless pards.

"I would like to know what is in the carvings on the logs that took Lucifer Lynx's breath," he suddenly resumed. "I've seen them fifty times, but never attempted to solve the riddle. The letters 'Z. W.' are the initials of Zeke Wildfoot, the man who raised Flavia, but even in this light they signify nothing. It is true that he was never found after the storm that made her a denizen of Thunder City; but if he lived, why didn't he hunt Flavia up? Zeke Wildfoot was not her father, we all know that; but he was coward enough to stay away after the storm, and leave the girl to her fate. I'll look at the carvings again. Since Lucifer Lynx saw something in them, why not I?"

Gold Grit turned back into the cabin and lit a lamp which he took from a shelf.

"They're all here yet!" he ejaculated, beginning the inspection, and for some minutes he was deeply immersed in a study of the strange knife-work on the logs.

Before beginning the inspection the young myth-hunter had closed the door of the mountain cabin, and the rays of his lamp were confined to the hut.

"I'll leave them for Lucifer Lynx; they're all Greek to me!" he exclaimed at last. "I doubt whether they mean anything. They may have been formed for the purpose of mystifying. Yes, Lucifer Lynx, I leave this mystery to you. Make all out of it you can. The time may come—"

Gold Grit stopped abruptly, and then sprang to the door.

"Have I been found?" he mentally exclaimed, and then he caught a heavy oaken bar which he had prepared for an emergency, and fixed it in place across the door.

Beyond all doubt, Gold Grit had heard a sound which convinced him that some persons were outside, and as he stood in the light of his little lamp with a revolver in his hand, he looked as magnificent as a young prince run down by his foes.

For some minutes the quiet of the mountain was not broken by a single sound.

Gold Grit had turned the light nearly out, but enough remained to show him the whole interior of his retreat.

All at once a rap sounded on the heavy door. It was not the stroke of a hand, but the hard blow, as the young gold-seeker knew, of the butt of a revolver.

It took the youth forward, and lent his eyes a firm defiant flash.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Don't yer know what a knock o' that sort means?" was the retort, in a harsh voice after a consultation in muffled tones. "It says in cold English that we want ther shanty door opened."

"We?" echoed the youth.

"Yes; Lightnin' Lay-out!"

The gold-hunter could not help recoiling at the answer. He knew that he had been proscribed by the rival of Thunder City on the eastern side of the "Divide," and not unknown to him was the hatred in which he was held by the six-and-sixty toughs who made that mountain den their abode.

He waited for a few moments to recover himself, but there was no sign of yielding in his look.

"Between Lightning Lay-out and Thunder City it is all one," he exclaimed, with a smile. "I am wanted at both places, and for what? At Lightning Lay-out because I tramp the 'Divide' too much to suit the footed ruffians there, and at Thunder City for a crime of which I am innocent."

This to himself in mental sentences, then he leaned toward the door again.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"We want you!"

That was plain enough.

"Well, gentlemen, there is a door between us."

"A door which you refuse ter open, eh?"

"Yes," and Gold Grit stepped aside touching the logs with his shoulder and waited for the next move.

He knew that his decision meant war.

By some means the bronzed eagles of Lightning Lay-out had found the mountain retreat, and between them and the boy whom they wanted there was but a door!

"We want you because ye'r in league with Satan," suddenly said a voice on the outside. "Thar ar' two ov you an' one ain't flesh an' blood either."

A smile broadened on the face of the hunted youth.

"What does the crank mean?" he ejaculated.

"Two of us? This is not true." And then he said aloud:

"I am the only Gold Grit in existence in any shape. There is—there can be no other!"

"We've seen you both!" was the reply. "Ther 'Red Divide' don't want ther reputation o' bein' ther devil's territory."

"It's got it now and no wonder!" ejaculated the myth-hunter, with a smile.

"We can't stan' hyer all night, boy. This is a game ther like o' which ther 'Divide' has never had!" exclaimed the voice, which had done all the talking on the outside. "Open the door afore we break it in."

Gold Grit looked at the heavy bar that rested firmly in its place and gave a smile of confidence.

"It is a battle against odds," he mentally exclaimed. "This is what I get for running from a lie in Thunder City."

A short silence succeeded the last demand, then all at once a loud report stunned the young miner's ears, and splinters flew from the door. The toughs of Lightning Lay-out had fired into it at short range!

"That is the beginning," muttered Gold Grit, and then slipping to the little window alongside the door, he lifted the buckskin curtain at one corner and looked out.

It was a moment when the sky was clear and the brilliant starlight aided somewhat by a declining moon revealed in part the ground before the cabin.

At first Gold Grit saw nothing, for the smoke of the revolvers had not lifted far above the ground; but in a minute he noticed the stalwart figures of the men who had come for him.

They stood in front of the mountain fort, veritable giants in the night, with broad hats variously trimmed, buckskinned trowsers in high boots, and embroidered jackets.

Lightning Lay-out had come in gala costume for the young gold-seeker of the mountains.

While Gold grit watched the toughs and counted them, seven in all, his fingers tightened without effort at the butt of his revolver.

"That's only an introduction!" sung out a voice. "Yer door ain't bullet-proof nor even man-proof! It'll fly like a broken shingle before ther twenty tigers o' Lay-out!"

"Thirteen from twenty leave seven!" exclaimed Gold Grit. "Men of Lightning Lay-out, I am where I see you all. My revolver is looking into your faces now and my finger is at the trigger. This is a fight for life, and I accept it as such. It is not an encounter of my seeking, therefore, the work of my revolver must not be put on my hands. This mountain cabin is my castle. It shall be defended!"

The myth-hunter's defiance drew the gaze of the ruffians to the window. They were all directly in his front.

Ten feet only separated the pards of Lightning Lay-out from the cabin.

The distance was hardly a full leap for the most agile.

In the silence that followed his last sentence Gold Grit thought he saw the villains planning new devilry.

Suddenly three of the gang disappeared.

This meant something, and the young bonanza trailer waited.

In a little while a shout assailed his ears, and when the four who had remained stepped aside, he saw the missing trio holding up the limb of a mountain pine, over which he had stepped a dozen times.

With this novel but dangerous battering-ram the door could be hurled in despite the heavy barricade.

Gold Grit acknowledged this in the depths of his heart.

"We make a last demand," cried the leader of the toughs, removing his laced hat. "Open the door or we open it with our artillery!"

"Open it yourselves!"

The seven gripped the ram with stern determination, and drew back for the charge.

The glittering revolver resting on the sill of the little window, awaited the signal.

All at once it rung loud and clear from the throat of the leader.

"For Lay-out an' victory! Charge!"

The seven stalwarts leaped forward, and then the cabin window seemed on fire!

CHAPTER XVIII.

JUST IN TIME.

"FOR Lay-out an' victory!—charge!"

The voice of the leader of the seven shouted these words in thunder tones, and the gang went straight at the shanty door with their battering-ram.

As we have said, the charge was followed by a flash of flame from the little window, and the foremost de-perado on the right threw up his hands and staggered back.

Again and again, three times in all, and in bewildering succession, the deadly revolver of Gold Grit spoke defiance in the faces of his foes.

Despite it all the "ram" struck the door with crashing force, and drew an exclamation of fear from the myth-hunter's lips.

The window would no longer do him any service, and with lips glued together, he stepped coolly back and waited for the door to be forced.

It was the most desperate moment of Gold Grit's life.

There was an interval of silence, a breathing space as it seemed, between the first blow and the next.

The sudden depletion of their ranks had not discouraged the besiegers.

Crash! crash! came the "ram" again against the door!

The barricade started, and Gold Grit stepped a little further back.

In another second the toughs of Montana would be inside. Nothing could prevent this catastrophe. Nothing!

Suddenly the operations of the ruffians were suspended. The bonanza-hunter wondered what had happened; he could not believe that help was at hand, for who would come to his rescue at that hour?

"Hello! what means all this?" rung out a loud voice, as the four giants in buckskin and lace were about to launch the "ram" for the last time against the cabin door.

"Seems ter me thet it's a game ov odds. Why, one man could nearly kick thet cabin over. Let up on thet batterin' game awhile, will yer?"

The speaker was walking toward the cabin with a heavy six-shooter hanging from one of his hands, and the four roughs were staring at him in astonishment.

"Hol thar's been work hyer!" the stranger went on, glancing at the human figures that lay in the starlight, and the next moment he halted in front of the quartette whose hands still gripped the effective "ram."

"Who ar' you?" asked one of the four.

"They call me Ozark Oil," was the answer.

"From Thunder, eh?"

"From Thunder City!"

"Well, we've treed ther varmint we war lookin' for in Thunder t'other night."

"Ah!" exclaimed the man who had come up.

"You belong ter Lightnin' Lay-out?"

"We do for a thousand!"

Ozark Oil threw a quick look toward the cabin.

"War all this fuss for one man?" he asked with a smile.

"For ther young myth-sharp o' ther 'Divide? As we couldn't get 'im in Thunder, we took to ther trail ourselves with this result—look!" and the speaker ground his teeth as his hand described the motionless forms on the ground.

"I didn't expect ter find Gold Grit in a fix like this," mentally ejaculated Ozark. "My opinion is that I've caught him in a close place. I know these men, they are the picked toughs o' the liars' nest over ther 'Divide.' But I am hyer ter save ther boy for Major Sphinx, an' it's got ter be done!"

Meantime the young gold-hunter in the battered shanty was listening almost breathless to the words passing between the parties outside.

"The respite has come in the shape of Ozark Oil of Thunder City," he remarked to himself.

"I never knew him to be a foe of mine, although he belongs to the gang who want my blood for Reckless Roy's death. I owe him something, however. He has stopped the assault; he has given me a breathing-spell, and the tigers of Lay-out may go back without their game."

"The young galoot in thar is outlawed," resumed one of the mountain pards, breaking the silence. "It war done in solemn caucus an' without a dissenting voice. We don't proscribe men in Lay-out just for ther fun o' proscribin' 'em. We're tired o' ther youngster who's in league with Satan."

"What would you do with him?"

"Ther answer ter thet question lies behind yer, Ozark Oil," was the reply. "Do you think we'd make 'im alcalde o' Lightnin' Lay-out?"

The sentence ended in a sneer.

"Gentlemen, I call a halt!" exclaimed the Thunder City tough. "The camp I represent has as good a right to the man in the shanty as Lightnin' Lay-out."

"After all this?"

"Yes."

There was an aggressive movement by the four toughs, but Ozark checked it by stepping quickly forward.

"Inter this mountain game any number o' players kin enter!" he continued. "It is free for all, an' I am hyer ter represent Thunder City."

"Which means—what?" demanded one of the quartette with a scowl.

"It means that I win if I kin!" and the next second two revolvers were thrust into the faces of the four.

"Gents, thar's not a drop o' friendly blood between Thunder an' Lay-out!" came from behind the leveled weapons. "It has been thus ever since the vulture first looked down on our respective towns, an' ther time has not come for Thunder ter give up its rights. Shall I make it plainer? You will take yer dead an' go back!"

This was plain enough for the most ignorant.

The quartette saw the athletic figure and cool black eyes of the man from Thunder, and they could look into the deadly barrels of the revolvers he held forward.

It was four against one, but the one had the advantage.

"Some other time, gents; not ter-night!" grinned Ozark Oil. "By-and-by, mebbe, ther

game will take a twist for Lay-out, but just now I'm sorry ter say it b'longs ter ther Idaho side o' ther everlastin' hills. You kin take my compliments back with yer dead. How many did ther boy get?—three? He must 'a' had yer full in ther face as yer came up."

There was no answer beyond flashing eyes and lowered brows.

The now useless "ram" had dropped from the hands of the late besiegers, and they stood at the mercy of revolvers as deadly as the one wielded by the young myth-hunter in the cabin.

"If we go, remember Thunder City will suffer for this!" suddenly blurted one of the four.

"You'll always find Thunder ready ter become a martyr!" smiled Ozark. "An' I kin say for it thet whenever you want a game, you will be accommodated in any shape. I give yer five minutes, gents. If any of yer ar' before me then I'm hable ter finger ther triggers I'm touchin' now."

The four men drew back as with a single motion, and Ozark Oil sprung forward, and by a quick turn brought his back to the cabin-door.

With a look of triumph in his eyes, he still covered the ruffians with the revolvers and watched them drag rather than carry off the victims of their mad attempt to get the proscribed.

It was the work of a few moments only, and as they disappeared, a noise sounded behind Ozark and the door opened.

"By Jupiter! warn't I in ther nick o' time, boy?" cried the Thunder City tough, springing to Gold Grit's side. "This is what I call by ther skin o' one's teeth, eh?"

"A close call," said the youth, holding out his hand. "I was not looking for you Ozark Oil."

"I should reckon not," was the answer; "but I'm one o' those handy devils what turn up unexpectedly, an' always whar I'm wanted. Thunder City is on top as usual. Oh, she never plays under dog in a fight, Gold Grit," and Ozark laughed, not so much over his victory, as at his delight to find the person of so much consequence to Major Sphinx.

The big tough of Thunder City had scored a success that gave him unlimited joy.

"I guess ther major's big game will move along now!" he cried to himself. "Of course, in order ter make it succeed, we've got ter keep Gold Grit from ther clutches of Sear Chick an' pards, but we kin do thet. Why should I work in double harness with Julian the Spider when I'm a whole boss myself? Jupiter jingo! they don't find better men than Ozark Oil wen it comes ter mountain-trailin' an' grit. I say it myself an' I'm always on hand ter prove ther assertion."

Gold Grit did not overwhelm his bronze deliverer with thanks.

He knew the nature of the man, but he did not know the real motive that had tempted him to the rescue. He was yet to find that out.

"What do they say about me in Thunder City?" the young bonanza-hunter asked with apparent anxiety.

"Nothin' very complimentary ov course," smiled Ozark. "You know under what circumstances you left thar?"

The young man flushed.

"Yes, under the brand of an infamous lie!" he exclaimed. "If I had it to do over, Ozark, I would not be here now. My hands shed Reckless Roy's blood; but they did not take his life. He was on the way to recovery when he died."

"So Doctor Lynx says," was the reply. "Whar is that man?"

"I don't know," which was true, for Gold Grit did not know where the Wonder-Detective was at that moment.

"Ain't he more than mere Doctor Lynx?" queried Ozark Oil.

"You will have to ask him."

"Just as if he would tell, ha, ha!" was the rejoinder. "If you had stayed in Thunder City, the pards o' Reckless Roy would have added you to the silent camp on the mountain-side. I am one o' those pards."

"What do you think of his death? Tell me the truth, Ozark, and look me in the eye while you talk."

"Thet's a point I won't discuss," was the answer. "I didn't come hyer ter give an opinion ag'in' ther sentence o' Thunder City. Do you want to go back thar?"

Gold Grit seemed to forget his promise to Lucifer Lynx.

"I am ready to go!" he exclaimed starting toward the door. "If you have come to escort me back, let us go!"

"Grit isn't always policy, my boy!" exclaimed Ozark. "You don't want ter go ter Thunder City just now any more than ter Lightnin' Lay-out in ther wake o' ther four pards who've just left hyer."

"Then, what is to be done? Am I to remain here and fight for my life?"

"No!"

"You are one of the would-be-avengers of Reckless Roy."

"I am not," replied the mountain sport. "There is a man who sent me upon your trail because he doesn't want to see you slaughtered like a sheep in the shambles."

"Who is he?"

"Major Sphinx?"

Ozark Oil saw the youth start slightly at mention of the Nabob's name.

"He isn't ther only friend you've got in Thunder," he went on. "Thar's another thar if I kin see straight, but she can't help yer like ther major kin. With friends like these employin' me, d'yer think I'd save yer from Lightning Lay-out ter take yer back ter ther nooses o' Thunder city?"

"I would not think so."

"I shall do nothin' o' ther kind! Hyer's ther pledge of Ozark Oil," and the sport of the "Divide" held out his hand which Gold Grit seized with eagerness, believing for the moment that Ozark was honest.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT SCAR CHICK'S TRAP CAUGHT.

ABOUT this time back in Thunder City Scar Chick was making ready to spring his much-vaunted "trap" on the magician-detective.

Totally ignorant of the desperado's purpose, Lucifer Lynx had seen the day decline and another night take its place.

If he had come back to the Idaho capital of the "Divide" for a special purpose, and we have heard him tell Flavia that he had, he was taking things leisurely, as if in no hurry to strike.

Scar Chick had not dropped his intention to unmask the spotter as a spy of Lightning Lay-out; he did not look behind the disguise of the eye in mourning and the full beard to see Doctor Lynx; if he had, he would have changed his tactics.

When he stopped Anaconda Alf returning from his interview with Flavia to announce that the test was ready, Scar Chick had no more arrangements to make.

"Whar is the man?" asked Anaconda Alf, with some eagerness, for the girl's few confessions had placed the magician before him in a new light.

"He has just dropped in upon Major Sphinx," answered the scarred sport with a smile. "He won't get a good welcome after the trick he played on the major last night, and Julian likes the trick he played on him none too well. I believe I'll waltz in on him at ther major's. After ther expose thar, Anaconda, I'll force him down to Happy Hank's, a confessed spy, an' turn 'im over to ther crowd!"

"That may be a big job," remarked Anaconda, cautiously.

"With a boss like me ter manage it?" exclaimed Scar Chick, flashing. "I'll unmask him so quick that he'll give himself away. I've beer waitin' for somebody ter witness ther play an' you're the man ov all I want."

Anaconda's eyes seemed to get a twinkle.

"This man may find the game bigger than he imagines it," he mentally ejaculated, looking Scar Chick over. "If Bruce Bartlett is a detective, as Flavia confesses, he came hyer knowin' that his life is at stake. I'll go with Scar Chick. The trap he brags about may not be such a trap after all."

Then, turning to the big bully of the camp, the lauk sport announced his willingness to be present at the coup, and the next moment they were seeking Major Sphinx's abode together.

A fierce eagerness that could only be born of expected victory shone in Scar Chick's eyes.

The man never thought of defeat; his intense hatred of everything that emanated from Lightning Lay-out was enough to goad him to desperation.

It was true that the magician-detective was at that moment Major Sphinx's guest, but not a welcome one as he was when, not long before, he had tickled the major's throat with the contents of the magic flask.

He had knocked at the shanty door when the major was enjoying an evening cigar preparatory to strolling down to Happy Hank's to mingle with the usual customers there, and to find out whatever he could about the man he did not like.

Indeed, as he had neither seen or heard of the magician since sundown, the major was in hope; that he had curtailed his visit and had slipped out of camp.

When lo! the rap on the door announced a caller, and Major Sphinx nearly dropped his cigar when he opened it and greeted—Bruce Bartlett!

In an instant, a dark cloud clothed the Nabob's brow.

"This man!" he ejaculated. "I wish he was in To-het!"

Politeness even to a disagreeable visitor forced the major to invite the magician in, an invitation which was promptly accepted, all too promptly for Sphinx's peace of mind.

"Accept the apology which I feel that I owe you," exclaimed the detective, bowing with a sunshiny smile. "It wasn't my intention to give you the shock I did last night, but—"

"It was devilish unpleasant," interrupted Major Sphinx. "I am fully recovered from it now. It was a good trick, too—it was, by Jove! ha, ha!"

It was the old expression so often used by the major, but the laugh had lost its jollity, and was now quite a mournful loss.

"It's my best trick, but one I can't explain,

magician as I am," said the detective seriously. "I have no control over that stick, and its wonderful properties are one of the mysteries of the unknown."

Major Sphinx started.

"Do you mean to say that you don't doctor that stick so as to make it bleed when you wish?" he cried, losing some color.

"I mean nothing less, my dear major."

"Then, you think—"

He stopped of his own accord, and appeared afraid to go further.

He was about to ask Bruce Bartlett if he had confidence in the divination of his blood-rod; but no! he could not do that.

It would savor of self-betrayal.

"It was very strange, to say the least," the major continued.

"Strange!—the most wonderful thing in existence! Beats the magic bottle, don't you think, major?"

"It beats the devil!"

Bruce Bartlett leaned back and laughed, all the while looking straight into the major's eyes.

"Major," he suddenly said, "as we are alone, I'd like to show you another trick which I don't often exhibit to a crowd."

The Nabob of Thunder City seemed to recoil as far as the back of his chair would let him.

He wanted no more legerdemain, not even of the sort that replenished the goblin flask.

"Aha! don't want the trick, eh?" cried the magician, leaning toward the major as if following him up. "There's no bleeding rod in it—nothing o' the sort. This egg is supposed to be produced by an East Indian bird—"

"Hang your East Indian magic!" blurted Major Sphinx, glaring at the small bluish egg which Bruce Bartlett held in his hand. "I've gone clear back on slight o' hand since last night. We don't want any more hyer!"

If the major had raised his eyes to the magician's he would have seen them get a new light.

"Here! hold your hand out!" Bruce Bartlett said in tones of command, and he seized the major's hand before he could withdraw it. "I lay this egg on your palm, thus. If the blood-rod lied last night the egg will remain whole; if it told the truth it will fall to pieces—ashes in your hand, Major Sphinx. Presto!"

The next instant the cabin rung with a cry that was heard by two men who were almost at the door.

Major Sphinx rose from the chair with the cry on his lips.

The egg had dissolved in the dropping of an eye-lash, and in his palm was a little heap of dark ashes!

"To Tartarus with your infernal magic!" exclaimed the Nabob of the "Divide," spurning the ashes with a shudder. "Why all these tricks on me? Your blood-rod lied and so has your infamous egg! We've never had such a charlatan as you in Thunder City, and by heavens! when you git away, we'll not pray for another."

"I presume not, major," answered Bruce Bartlett gliding toward the flushed Nabob. "There is blood on your hands and you know it. I am more than I pretend to be."

"I thought so!"

"I am a man who has sworn to right one of the most infamous wrongs ever perpetrated. In order to know me better let me say that under the mask I wear here is the body of Frank Hunter, the man who has sworn to hunt down the villains who planned and executed the Julien robbery and more than murder in New York."

"My God!"

It was impossible to keep the ejaculation back.

Major Sphinx was almost against the cabin wall, and with his face quite colorless, he was staring at the magician-detective with eyes that seemed ready to leave his head!

"Not a word of remonstrance or denial!" continued Bartlett in the same stern tones. "I am here to play out the game that I've had a hand in ever since the discovery of the crime. Don't ask me how I discovered that you are the man I want. The story need not be told here. The partner who has come all the way from New York to Thunder City will know before long that the Gotham Ferret did not die in the river on a certain night. Ha, ha! major. This is one of the longest trails of my life, but I will soon be at the end!"

"What do you want?" asked the white-faced man.

"You!" was the reply. "We are going away from Thunder City to night. I will come back or go elsewhere for Julian the Spider when I want him. How about the million that depends on Gold Grit recovering his recollection of past events, eh, major?"

Major Sphinx seemed to have lost the power of speech, but he could think.

"Would to God somebody would come—Julian, Scar Chick—anybody!" passed through his mind.

The case was desperate, and the Nabob saw it in all its phases.

Suddenly the door opened.

Superstitious to a great extent, Major Sphinx believed the event a response to his wish.

He saw in the lamp-light the giant figure and peculiar features of Scar Chick, the bully of the "Divide."

Behind him was Anaconda Alf.

The appearance of these two bronze angels of destruction sent a thrill through the Nabob. They were as good as the Spider with all his coolness and cunning.

"Hello!" exclaimed Scar Chick. "Hyer's ther spy o' Lightning Lay-out! Ther disguise ar' too thin. Throw up yer hands an' confess! Ther game is up!"

The magician-detective had stepped aside at the opening of the door, and he now occupied a spot from which he could see all three of the men at once.

"The man war right!" ejaculated Anaconda Alf. "I kin now see Doctor Lynx's eye in his head."

Scar Chick had not come to the major's cabin unprepared, and the swift glance of Lucifer Lynx saw the six-shooter held in his dark left hand.

"Spy ov Lightning, we've cornered yer fer death!" the camp desperado suddenly went on. "Up with yer hands an' walk out with nothin' in 'em! Ye're a man o' tricks, from what we saw last night, but this ar' a trick not in yer portfolio!"

Major Sphinx, with color in his face, once more looked at the cornered man.

"This is a turnin' of the tables," he said to himself. "Scar Chick never plays with the game he catches in his traps."

What would the magician do?

"So I'm from the liars' nest over the Divide, eh?" he suddenly cried.

"Ye ar', fer a thousand!" was the retort.

"And you, for twice that sum, are the biggest liar 'twixt Helena and Frisco! Step aside, gentlemen. Let the door stand open. Major Sphinx, you will march out with your hands in your pockets. If you take them out you will drop in your boots! I am playing a big game for justice. Forward, major! These two pards will not interfere. I have them at the mercy of Lucifer Lynx's revolvers!"

Scar Chick's trap had caught a Tartar.

CHAPTER XX.

FLAVIA EXPLODES A BOMB.

THE magician-detective was on top.

Major Sphinx glanced appealingly to Scar Chick and Anaconda Alf, but neither sport lifted a hand in his behalf.

"This is pardship with a vengeance! But never mind—I'll get even with you two fellows one o' these days!" growled the major, as he thrust his hands into the depths of his pockets, and told Lucifer Lynx with a scowl that he was ready to obey the mandate to march out.

A minute later the self-styled Nabob of Thunder City stood in the starlight beyond the shanty door.

The detective, who was only a few feet away, was eyed by Scar Chick in the most vindictive manner.

The bully had sprung his trap with very little success; indeed, he had made one of the most ignominious failures of his life.

"Look hyer!" suddenly grated Scar Chick, leaning toward Lucifer Lynx. "This is your night; to-morrow may belong to Thunder City!"

A smile came instantly to the lips of the spotter.

"We will meet to-morrow when it comes," he said. "I am not a spy for Lightning Lay-out. I have no affiliations with the tough customers who occupy the Montana side of the "Divide." I am engaged in a little game of my own just now. Major Sphinx will be asked to accompany me, and he will go. Good-night, gentlemen. Come, major!"

Once more and for the last time Major Sphinx looked at the two men, but they did not stir; then he walked away, watched and guarded by the man whose eye looked as deadly as the revolver cocked in his velvet hand.

"If he isn't a spy for Lay-out, who is he?" asked Scar Chick, wheeling upon Anaconda Alf.

"He's a cool one."

"Cool!" and the bully of the camp sent the word through clinched teeth. "That man has the assurance of Satan himself! He is as cool as a certain Captain Coldgrip I used to know, an' he was coolness in boots. Yonder he goes—with Major Sphinx. I begin ter believe now that the rod didn't bleed for nothin' last night."

"It bled for a purpose," answered Anaconda Alf, recalling what Flavia had told him concerning the detective, but he did not see fit to reveal the cool man's identity to Scar Chick.

"I wish I had suspected him last night," growled the bully. "We kin foller him up, but what is Major Sphinx, anyhow? Ov what practical good has been ter Thunder City since he came hyer? Let Bruce Bartlett take him off. Hang me, if I walk a step to rescue the chump. But the man who has just played his bluff game—I'll kill him on sight!"

By this time the figures of Lucifer Lynx and his captive had disappeared among the shadows of night, and when Scar Chick looked again and saw them not, he put up the heavy six-shooter whose trigger he did not get to press.

"Shall we go down to Hank's?" asked Anaconda Alf.

Scar Chick started.

"Down thar without my man?" he ejaculated. "Not now! I promised the boys that I would catch something in the trap, an' they're waitin' for the game. You kin go down an' break the news, Anaconda. Julian is with 'em, an' you'll hear an outburst o' rage when he catches on. He is more than he appears ter be—Julian is. Between you an' I, Anaconda, that man came hyer for mischief!"

"He came from Helena, but he don't b'long to the town."

"Of course he don't. He's got city ways or I'm a shrimp!" exclaimed Scar Chick. "If I war ter gauge that new sport, I'd say that he war first a mountain tough an' later a city tiger. You want ter watch him when you break the news o' the magician's last trick ter ther crowd at Hank's."

The two men separated, one going toward the famous saloon of Thunder City where the prominent events of camp life took place, and the other toward the opposite part of the camp.

The latter person was Scar Chick.

"Beat by a magic sharp!" he growled, his eyes flashing at the thought. "Thar'll be a twinkle in the girl's eyes when she sees me, an' if I don't confront it now, mebbe I'll lose by it after awhile."

A little while afterward Scar Chick saw a cabin door open in response to a light rap by his hand, and the person on the inside uttered a cry at sight of him.

It was Flavia.

"Pardon me, but I war passin' by an' saw ther light," said the bully of Thunder City in a coarse apologetic tone.

There was a mental question in the girl's eyes, but she did not speak.

She knew that Scar Chick was to spring a trap of some kind on Lucifer Lynx.

Had he tried it and failed? or, was it yet to be sprung to the doom of the detective?

Flavia thought she could read disappointment on Scar Chick's countenance, but for all that it was a singular admixture of madness and uncertainty.

He soon relieved her.

"Well, Flavia," he continued, as he leaned against the door with the lamplight on his bronze face and burly figure, "for once my trap failed ter catch the fox."

He said this with a smile that did not represent the state of his thoughts. The girl could not repress a start.

Lucifer Lynx, her friend and Gold Grit's, was safe yet, thank fortune!

"He turned ther tables on me slick an' clean," Scar Chick went on as he leaned toward the girl whose eyes showed her satisfaction. "By Jupiter! he played a hand that'll stir Thunder City when ther boys hear it. He carried off ther major!"

"What?" ejaculated Flavia.

"He's left camp takin' Major Sphinx with him," answered Scar Chick slowly.

The girl seemed struck dumb by the announcement.

"I'm hyer ter say that I don't keer much about ther major; 'he's nothin' ter me, Flavia. But by ther eyes ov Jupiter! I don't like ther way my trap worked. You're laughin' at me now."

"I am not," cried Flavia, although her sparkling eyes did not confirm her words.

"I'll make it work yet!" flashed Scar Chick, and his hand caught Flavia's wrist before she could withdraw it. "Thet man is not what I thought he war—a spy of Lightning Lay-out. Under ther mask he wore last night he carries another skin! But what do I keer? Long Lige, who has an eye like an eagle, says he looks like the Doctor Lynx who tried ter save Reckless Roy; but this time I guess Lige has used his eyes for nothin'. Don't you think so, Flavia?"

The fair girl nodded assent.

"Ther youngster won't come back hyer soon," continued Scar Chick. "He knows thet ther death o' Reckless Roy's sealed his doom. Why, his neck wouldn't be worth the rope they'd take ter hang him with. Thet doctor had ther impudence ter say thet somebody in Thunder City—some one o' ther pards—and not Gold Grit, helped Reckless Roy across ther border!"

"Yes," said Flavia. "He said it before all of you, I am told."

"He did," admitted Scar Chick. "It warn't advisable then ter refute a lie o' thet magnitude, and so I let him waste it on ther air. He gained time by it an' got ther young red-handed scamp off. Thar's no livin' person in Thunder ter-night who b'lieves thet Reckless did not die from ther wound given by ther myth-hunter o' ther 'Divide.' You b'lieve thet, Flavia?"

The beauty of Thunder City suddenly drew back.

"Don't you b'lieve it?" cried Scar Chick flushing as he followed her up.

Flavia stood at one end of the little table with her perfect and queenly figure drawn to its true height, and with her bewitching eyes fixed upon the head sport of Thunder City.

The lamplight falling softly upon her face seemed to render her beauty the more striking,

and Scar Chick appeared to regard her with new eyes.

"No. I can't believe it," she said in firm tones.

The big sport of the "Red Divide" recoiled, but the next moment, with a suddenly transformed countenance, he was leaning toward the girl with his big dark hands on the table.

"What put that crazy belief in your head?" he exclaimed. "Did Doctor Lynx hoodwink you?"

"No," answered Flavia. "Sit down," and she pointed to the chair at Scar Chick's end of the table.

The desperado hesitated.

"I want to tell you why I do not believe that Reckless Roy died from the wound that Gold Grit gave him," she resumed. "I can tell it better if you take a seat."

The bully of Thunder City dropped into the chair and said, across the table:

"You'll have ter tell an almighty straight story ter convince me, Flavia. By Jericho! if thet young myth-trailer hadn't shot Reckless the Golden Gates wouldn't hev opened for him yet. That's my opinion, and I'm afraid you can't make me give it ther go-by."

For a moment Flavia eyed the sport in silence; then, as one of her hands came up and dropped on the table, under the lamp, she began:

"I will go back to Reckless Roy's last day. He was on the mend from the first flushes of light to the very moment when death found him. Doctor Lynx had unbounded hopes in his recovery, and I had looked in upon him myself to find that he had taken a big turn for the better. When night came and found Reckless Roy sound asleep on his cot, the doctor left him for a little while. He had not been gone long when a man came from toward Happy Hank's. He came along in a manner that told that he did not want to be seen by the whole camp. He had the step of a cat that approaches a wary victim."

"This man came to Reckless Roy's shanty. The door stood slightly ajar, and he opened it a little more and looked in. After a few moments he opened it wider and stepped inside. Reckless Roy lay on his back, fast asleep, with the shanty lamp fastened to a peg in the wall not far away. The visitor stood over Roy for some time. He had shut the door behind him, and was alone with the bully of the 'Divide.' All at once he began to stoop. Lower and lower he went, until at length he knelt at the very edge of Reckless Roy's cot."

"Then it was that this man raised his hands. They hovered over the sleeper's head like vultures, but all at once they fell—snap! upon Reckless Roy's throat!"

Flavia threw her body forward as she uttered the last sentence.

"Heavens! who saw all this?" cried Scar Chick, starting back as far as his chair would let him.

"Let me finish," continued Flavia, coolly.

"Go on."

"Well, when the hands of his man dropped upon the throat of Reckless Roy, they stuck there like leeches! not only that, but they closed like the devil's vise. Roy started from his sleep, but what could he do in the grip that held him down? This wound had taken his strength; he was a child in the hands of the man who had come like a thief for his life. By and by the man got up and looked down at his work. A smile stole over his face and he said aloud: 'I guess we'll loop the gold sharp now!' Then he turned to the door and went away leaving Reckless Roy dead behind him!"

A silence fell upon the conclusion of Flavia's story. She was leaning forward with her eyes riveted upon Scar Chick, whose face was a curiosity.

"Is this all?" he asked, in a voice not like his own.

"My God! isn't it enough?" exclaimed the girl.

He laughed.

"I should say it is! But who can vouch for the truth o' this yarn o' murder? Who saw all this?"

The girl's eyes got a sudden sparkle and her hand darting across the table fell upon the desperado's wrist.

"I am the witness!" she cried. "I saw the whole dark drama!"

"You?"

"Flavia, the waif of the 'Divide!'" was the answer. "The man who killed Reckless Roy is in Thunder City to-night. More than this. He is before me now!"

Scar Chick sprung from the chair with a wild cry, and Flavia looked at him in triumph.

CHAPTER XXI.

FLAVIA KEEPS HER HEAD.

THE man standing before the beauty of Thunder City was white, but with passion.

He looked at her like a man who is struck by some terrible announcement.

Flavia did not know what he was going to do.

She had launched her bomb, and it had proved des ructive.

"So I am the man who did all this, am I?" he suddenly exclaimed, darting toward the girl as if he intended to jerk her out of the chair.

She did not flinch.

"You are the man!" she said, coolly, meeting his look half-way. "Do you stand where you are, Scar Chick, sport of Thunder, and tell me you are not?"

He did not speak for a moment, and then he showed his teeth in a malicious grin.

"You have no proof!" he said.

"Just as if I want any!" and Flavia rose slowly and leaned toward him. "You know, Scar Chick, that my word will outweigh yours even here in Thunder City."

He looked at her, astonished.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

Flavia smiled.

Scar Chick had not denied the truth of the story she had told with no embellishments. His actions and his look betrayed him; the man was guilty.

"I will let the future control my action, Flavia said in reply to his question, and then she let her hand drop upon his sleeve again.

"What are you going to do?"

"Me? I'm goin' ter stay whar I am, if it suits me!" he exclaimed with a desperado's bravado.

"You say that Gold Grit did not kill Reckless Roy? This is not substantiated by any witnesses. You don't want ter stir the camp up with a story of this sort; you can't afford ter, Flavia," he added mysteriously.

The girl's eyes flashed, but she caused the light to fade by a powerful effort.

"Well, we will not discuss that point," she went on.

"You think you have me under your thumb, eh?"

"I think nothing of the kind. I know who killed Reckless Roy; that is enough."

"Which means that Gold Grit is not ter be sentenced hyar?"

"Yes, it means that."

"All right!" exclaimed the bully of Thunder City. "By glory! we'll cross the rivers as we cometer them! I am not answerable for the actions of the pards o' Thunder. If Gold Grit war to come back they'd be likely to throw a rope over ther first liab."

"And what would you do?" asked Flavia, flushing.

"What could one man do?" he laughed.

Flavia made no reply, but looked him steadily in the face for several moments.

"Flavia, I've often thought what a stage queen you'd make!" he went on, laughing still, but over his own words now. "I've never seen your like on any of the stages in Frisco. You don't need any trainin', for you could go right upon the boards an' beat creation. Thar war Nugget Nell, whom we made protegee of Camp Coonskin. She got upon ther stage and dazzled ther hull continent."

Flavia did not move till he had finished.

"Are you in earnest?" she asked. "Do you want me to quit Thunder City? Why, your luck would go with me!"

"Luck be hanged!" cried Scar Chick. But no, Flavia, I warn't more than half in earnest, ha, ha! The major used ter say that he'd see you in a fine posish' one o' these days, but he won't now, I guess."

"Did Major Sphinx ever say much things?"

"Yes."

"What did he mean?"

"I don't know."

"Anything about the stage?"

"I used ter think he meant that; but I'm not as intimate with him as Ozark is, nor as is that man who says he came from Helena, when his city edge hasn't worn off yet."

"Julian?"

"Julian! that man in whose hands ther blood-stick bled last night! But I'm not going ter keep you hyer forever, Flavia."

He drew back toward the door.

"I must remind him that he cannot go too far," said the girl to herself. "I have a grip on this enemy of Gold Grit's which he will feel if he attempts to do violence. Gold Grit may come back here. There is no telling what phases this mountain game may assume before it's played out. All is in the future. Julian is here, Ozark has gone to find Gold Grit at Major Sphinx's command, and the major himself is in the hands of Lucifer Lynx the detective."

With these thoughts Flavia came toward Scar Chick, who seemed to anticipate her resolve.

"I'll raise no rumpus," he exclaimed with a light laugh.

She stopped in front of him.

"Let us understand one another, Scar Chick," she answered impressively. "I do not intend to tell the open truth about Reckless Roy's death unless circumstances force it from me."

"Hol is that it?" cried the desperado.

"Yes."

"Then, you'll never get the chance in all probability!" was the reply, and before Flavia could fathom its meaning Scar Chick said "good-night" and was gone!

"Great Jehosaphat! who thought she knew it!" ejaculated the sport of the "Divide" when he found himself under the stars and some distance from the girl's abode. "A secret is never

safe with a woman, and one like this I'd sooner keep all by myself. What's ter be done?"

He stopped short and looked back toward the cabin.

"She laughed at my stage suggestion," he went on. "She wouldn't have thought me in earnest if I had sworn ter it. By Jupiter! there's more in it than she dreams of. I'll bet a thousand that I kin open Stage Saul's eyes with my story of a mountain Siddons that has never been discovered. But sartin things keep me hyer. She thinks Gold Grit will never come back. I know better. He is as sure ter come ter Thunder City as ther sun is ter climb the sky to-morrow! And when he comes back he passes in his chips for ther death o' Roy—secret or no secret?"

The big sport blurted out the last sentence in a voice that might have been heard twenty feet away.

And heard he was.

A motionless figure, slightly bent forward, stood in the star-thrown shadow of a cabin, and while Scar Chick could not be seen distinctly, his voice surely located him.

When the head sport of Thunder City moved forward again he had a nimble follower at his heels, and the watcher did not leave him until he entered Happy Hank's gold-camp ranch.

Scar Chick was instantly surrounded by a dozen roughs whose oaths and exclamations told that Anaconda Alf had performed his mission by reporting Lucifer Lynx's departure with Major Sphinx.

"Let the fool go!" cried Scar Chick. "What monuments ter industry did he ever erect in Thunder City? I wouldn't turn on my heel ter fetch him back, though I would like ter git ther drop on that sleight-o'-hand sharp! Mebbe I will some day!" he added, tossing down a glass of Happy Hank's hottest. "Whar's Long Lige?"

"Hyer."

An unusually tall and gaunt citizen of Thunder City stepped forward.

"Do you think now what you've told me once—that Lucifer Lynx is Bruce Bartlett?" inquired Scar Chick.

"I do."

"Anything more?"

"Yes, but not hyer," answered the tall sport, with a significant look.

"Then come outside."

In a moment the head sport and Long Lige had passed beyond the cabin saloon and were close together.

"What do you know now?" asked Scar Chick, eagerly.

"I've unmasked ther other man."

"Who?"

"Julian, ther major's pard."

Scar Chick started.

This was something totally unexpected.

He knew Long Lige to be the shrewdest man with his eyes in Thunder City; it was often said in a joke that he could "see through a mountain."

"Ah! you're onter that gent, ar' you?" exclaimed Scar Chick. "My net is ready for all kinds o' fish. Go ahead, Lige."

"He isn't Julian any more than I'm Satan."

"Well?"

"That man is the famous Devil Jule!"

Scar Chick recoiled with a cry he could not suppress.

"Impossible!" he ejaculated.

"True as gospel! They don't wear their masks long whar Long Lige uses his eyes. I've been achin' ter tell yer this! I kin swear on a stack o' Bibles—"

"That this city tiger is Devil Jule o' ther Northwest, who some years ago had an offer on his head?"

"Yes."

The discovery seemed to take Scar Chick's breath.

"He came hyer for a purpose."

"For a big play with a bold hand!" cried Long Lige.

Scar Chick threw a look toward the saloon.

"Whar is he?" he asked.

"He left soon after Anaconda reported ther magician's play."

"How did he take it?"

"It seemed ter please him, but I'll stake a thousand that Anaconda didn't see it. I don't mean that he expected anything of ther kind; but he won't hunt much for ther major!"

"An' they are friends, too!" exclaimed Scar Chick.

Long Lige made no reply; he seemed to be rejoicing in silence over the discovery he had made.

"Let him wear his disguise a little while," Scar Chick suddenly continued. "You don't tell any of the boys yet."

"No. You an' I, cap'n, ar' ther only holders o' ther secret so far."

"We'll trip him up," laughed Scar Chick.

"Devil Jule, eh?" I wonder whar he met Major Sphinx, an' what game these two ar' playin'? Ther major thinks thar's a bonanza o' some kind in Gold Grit, but it'll never pan out rich for him. Julian is one o' those tigers who live in kids in the cities; hyer he doesn't wear 'em! Lige, we keep this secret for a time."

"For a year or a night, just as you say, cap'n," was the reply,

"Not for a year, Lige," laughed Scar Chick. "We'll go in an' drink in silence over our new diskivery."

The two men returned to the bar, and though therest of the mountain pards held their glasses high and swore new oaths against Lucifer Lynx, Scar Chick and Long Lige looking at one another, drank silently.

It was midnight when the head sport of Thunder City and his congenial pards left the mountain bar-room. One by one they filed through the door and separated under the stars.

Major Sphinx had been left to his fate, for under the advice of Scar Chick, the pards had resolved to attempt no rescue.

The Nabob of the "Divide" had saved Gold Grit's life on the duelling ground, and the men of Thunder were now paying him back.

Scar Chick went home and to bed.

In a little while he was fast asleep, nor did he waken till the first arrows of a new day were darting above the eastern horizon.

All at once a body seemed to fall against his cabin door.

"Jericho Josh! what war that?" cried the sport.

In a moment he was out of bed and on an expedition of inquiry.

He opened the door and looked out.

"Great God!—Long Lige!" cried Scar Chick. A man lay in the light on the ground.

The sport stooped over him.

It was Long Lige—dead, and cold!

CHAPTER XXII.

GOLD GRIT'S RETURN.

"I GUESS the secret about Julian is all mine now!" was Scar Chick's next ejaculation as he gripped the body and drew it inside. "If Lige has been killed, I'll have a pretty good idea who did it; but I'll not explode any bomb till the right time comes."

In the light of his lamp, for day had not fairly set in, the head sport of Thunder City began to examine the corpse.

It did not take him long to discover that Long Lige had been killed by a human hand, for in the breast was a wound undoubtedly inflicted by a bowie.

"He war cold when I found him," muttered Scar Chick. "An' he warn't killed whar he lay, either. The man who did this work dragged the body hyer an' stood it against my door. He meant that I should know that he owns a knife thet kills. I've found that out, an' by the eternal heavens! he's likely ter diskiver that thar's a duplicate o' his knife hyer in Thunder!"

In less than thirty minutes after the finding of the corpse at the cabin door, the pards of the "Divide" knew all they could know about the tragedy. A bronze crowd surrounded Long Lige, and curses loud and deep found utterance.

Some were inclined to think that the man who had taken Major Sphinx away had come back and left this mark, and when questioned about his opinion, Scar Chick shook his head and said but little that was satisfactory.

The body was carried to Long Lige's cabin, where it was left until several pards should carry it forth at night to the cemetery on the mountain. The roughs went back to Happy Hank's, where they discussed the crime and tried to fathom it.

Night came again.

During the day Scar Chick had paid a good deal of attention to Julian the Spider.

The New York sport had mingled freely with the pards, and no person had shown more indignation over the murder than he.

When asked why he did not attempt to rescue the major from the hands of the magician-detective, he would laugh and say that the Nabob was able to take care of himself, which Thunder City very much doubted.

In fact, Julian did not seem the close friend of Major Sphinx which he had been accounted, and the pards thought that he did not mourn the abduction.

"If that man is the real Devil Jule, as Long Lige thought, he is playing a big game," murmured Scar Chick as he watched the sport from the East. "Give me a chance an' I'll settle the whole matter in a few moments. Thar's no great tie between him an' the major; if thar war, an' he Devil Jule, he'd be on ther trail now. If Ozark had been hyer he'd never let Bruce Bartlett get off unhunted. I wonder if Ozark has found ther myth-hunter? If he has, he dare not fetch him back ter Thunder!"

It was near nine o'clock when Scar Chick, on opening the door of his shanty, found himself confronted by a man.

"Cap'n! by Jovel ther man I want," exclaimed this individual, who held in his left hand the bridle-rein of a horse whose ribs could almost be counted in the starlight.

"Who ar' you?" cried Scar Chick loftily, as he leaned slightly forward and looked the man over from head to foot.

"I am Old Jingo!"

"That's nobody," snapped Scar Chick.

"It's me all the same. I'm ther Cute Catamount ov Bozeman. Mebbe you've heard o' me now."

"Never did."

"Great heavens! what is fame?" exclaimed the Catamount. "I thought thar warn't a man, woman or child 'twixt Bozeman an' Frisco thet hadn't heard from me in some way. I'm familiar with ther 'Divide'—know it like a book, cap'n—but hyer's one man who never heard o' me! This is worse than death! I'm crushed! Who might you be?"

"I am Scar Chick."

"A citizen o' this dove-cote?"

"Yes."

Scar Chick was not inclined to be communicative.

He did not like to be pestered with a man like the Cute Catamount from Bozeman. He could see that the fellow had a keen eye in his head, but his clothes were not of the best, and besides, they were rather dirty.

Scar Chick wanted to get rid of the man.

"Mebbe you'd like ter catch on ter a new bonanza, cap'n," said the Catamount.

"Don't want any."

The rebuff seemed to stagger the stranger, for Scar Chick had spoken in the most crusty manner.

"Ye'r ther first mountain seraph who don't affect gold wings," the man from Bozeman ejaculated. "Money's no object ter me, an' I've enriched many a individual in consequence thereof. Cap'n, ther Cute Catamount ov Bozeman is a bonanza in disguise."

"You'll find bidders at Happy Hank's—none here!" and the head sport of Thunder showed signs of turning away.

"Cap'n, thet hoss is worth his weight in dust," suddenly exclaimed the Catamount, stepping back and waving his hand toward his skeleton animal. "I call 'im Transparency, because you kin see ther landscape through 'im like through a winder. His blood ain't as plentiful as tler blood ov a Norman, but every drop is as dear ter that hoss as my rich blood is ter me. He kin run like a due-bill, and is as gentle as a widdier. That hoss isn't for sale. He is a bonanza medium—that is, I kin turn him loose an' he'll go straight ter a new mine."

"Take him down to Hank's an' show up his qualities," exclaimed Scar Chick. "The Loys like a circus that's all clown."

"All right, cap'n. You won't go along, eh?"

"No."

"Then ther Catamount will see you later."

"You needn't be partic'lar, 'bout that!" answered the sport, and the Cute Catamount found the door shut in his face, while he was left to take the rebuff as he desired.

"This is a cold world, old pard," Scar Chick heard the man say to his horse. "You an' I hev run ag'in' more human icicles than we kin count. Happy Hank's, eh? We'll hev ter skirmish 'round for ther place. Mebbe we'll find men thar."

A smile stole over Scar Chick's bronze face as he listened to these remarks, and the next moment he heard the two well-matched pards moving away.

"Thunder's gettin' ter be a resort for fools an' knaves," he exclaimed. "By Jupiter! if this isn't stopped, we'll hev ter legislate ag'in' it! Ther Cute Catamount of Bozeman is perfectly harmless, but we don't want ter be bored with his like."

Scar Chick walked across his room and lifted one end of his cot.

Diving his hand into a dark opening he presently brought up a bottle the sight of which seemed to bring a glitter to his eyes. "Mebbe this ain't like ther liquor Bruce Bartlett poured out o' his magic flask, but it's good enough for me all ther same," he cried, producing a tin cup which he placed on the table.

A minute later he poured out a large drink and threw it down with much gusto.

"I've a notion ter face Julian," he said aloud.

"He don't know that I've got Long Lige's secret about ther link between Julian an' Devil Jule. I kin make ther ground drop from under him with a word. He went ter his shanty awhile ago. I'll take another bracer an' explode the bomb!"

Scar Chick smiled to himself while he poured out a second drink, and then replaced the bottle.

He was going to tell Major Sphinx's pard that his true character was known, that, such being the case, he was not wanted in Thunder City where he would not be safe a minute as Devil Jule, the branded outlaw of the Northwest.

His absence from the scene of his outlawry so long would not shield him. He might call himself a citizen of New York or from where he pleased; as Devil Jule, he deserved the meanest of deaths.

Scar Chick was in need of a triumph of some kind. He could not forget Flavia's accusation; the girl might expose him to the pards of Thunder and unless he could make himself "solid" by some great coup, he would fall when the waif of the storm should speak.

Julian the Spider was his opportunity.

He could march the man down to Happy Hank's at the revolver's muzzle, and there expose him to the assembled crowd as Devil Jule, the branded.

He had not forgotten that his last trap had failed to hold the sport-detective, but this thought only made him determined to win this time.

The head sport of Thunder prepared for the occasion. He examined his six-shooters in the lamp-light, and even framed the sentences of accusation. There was to be no failure, and Scar Chick felt the need of success for he had already marked Julian for a man who was coolness itself.

The new sport's cabin was not far off; a few lengthy strides would take him to it; he would open the door and say:

"Good-night, Devil Jule!"

With all his deliberate preparations finished, Scar Chick at last went toward the door.

"I'm goin' ter make this a big night in Thunder City's calendar!" he ejaculated.

He put forward his hand to open the door, when it was opened from without and Scar Chick started back.

"Great Caesar!" rung from his throat as his eyes seemed to start from his head in amazement. "I warn't lookin' for you!—I expected Satan first!"

The person who walked boldly into the desperado's cabin and halted before him in the light of the lamp was indeed the last person he expected to confront there.

It was Gold Grit!

"No, I guess you weren't expecting me!" said the young man. "I can't play coward and please myself. Scar Chick, I have come back to face the thing out."

Scar Chick was astounded.

He could not believe that the youth whose blood was wanted for the death of Reckless Roy would walk deliberately into the clutches of his enemies.

There was something more than foolhardiness in it to the boss rough of the "Red Divide."

Had the beauty of Flavia brought him back? And did he know that his friend, Major Sphinx, was no longer near to step between him and death?

There was fearlessness in the attitude assumed by Gold Grit before the desperado in his cabin.

His voice had no tremor.

"By Jericho! you kin face the thing out if you want ter!" suddenly ejaculated Scar Chick, stepping toward the myth-hunter. "I want ter tell you beforehand that ther boys hev'n't cooled down a bit; that they're just as eager ter avenge Reckless Roy as they war ther night he died. I'll say, too, in advance, that Major Sphinx is gone."

"It is all one to me, Scar Chick," was the quick and coolly uttered response. "I demand a trial. I am ready for the ordeal."

"I'll have to let Julian go for the moment," muttered the sport. "This is a play I didn't look for, but I'll make the most of it. The young chap wants an immediate trial. I'll accommodate him, and before the girl can interfere I'll make myself proof against her charges! Now is my time. The young gold sharp has come back ter Thunder ter die."

Then he looked into Gold Grit's face and said:

"We'll find ther court at Happy Hank's. If you've got sand enough—"

"To Happy Hank's!" interrupted Gold Grit.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON TRIAL FOR HIS LIFE.

THE Cute Catamount of Bozeman was showing off to the assembled pards at Happy Hank's while Scar Chick and the returned myth-hunter were walking thither.

The strange man had led his gaunt saddle-horse into the trap, and was expatiating on his good qualities after a manner that kept the house in a roar.

Some of the bronze toughs put their hands against their ribs and leaned back and laughed.

Despite the fact that Long Lige had just been carried to his narrow home on the mountain-side, it was a good-natured crowd, and the Cute Catamount was the very man to keep it in a bubble.

The horse, as a horse, was not worth five dollars; he was a lengthy, narrow, meek-looking animal, and gave no promise of the truth of his owner's remark that he could "catch lightning and not half try."

The Catamount praised him to the skies and gave him a wonderful pedigree, then wound up by declaring that the innocent-looking Rosinante was a bonanza medium which made him of priceless value.

It was at the conclusion of this assertion that two men appeared in the doorway of Happy Hank's place.

"Jupiter Pluvius! the boy gold sharp!" exclaimed somebody, and the next moment the pards were staring at Scar Chick and his companion, Gold Grit.

The Cute Catamount and his wonderful steed were forgotten, and all traces of merriment instantly vanished from the faces of the crowd.

The man from Bozeman turned and took in the pair at a glance.

He seemed to start, and it was when his eyes fell upon the young bonanza-hunter.

The pards of Thunder City moved toward Scar Chick as if all were goaded by the same impulse, but the head sport of the "Divide" checked them by lifting his hand.

"This man has come back for trial," he said, pointing at Gold Grit, who had halted before the pards with his handsome figure erect and fearlessness in his eye. "In his own words, as nigh as I kin repeat 'em, he's hyer ter face the thing through! I've fetched him hyer, men o' Thunder. Reckless Roy is dead an' I b'lieve I kin safely say that if it hadn't been for the prisoner he'd not be on ther mountain to-night!"

"For a thousand he wouldn't!" growled several men in the crowd.

"Right you ar', Scar Chick!" cried as many others.

"We've condemned him already! Didn't he know that when he came back?"

All eyes were fixed upon the young gold-hunter.

He heard somebody behind him shut the door which had been left ajar, but he did not see the hand that performed this action drop an iron bar into its place.

Happy Hank, always Gold Grit's secret friend, leaned over the whisky-soaked counter with genuine sorrow in his look. He would have given his little mountain den with pleasure if the youth had not come back, and the solicitous fellow could not imagine what had prompted his return.

"I'd sooner wade inter a million catamounts," muttered Happy Hank. "I might have a chance thar with a few six-shooters, but hyer he has none. Has he forgotten Flavia? Mebbe, by Jovel the girl's give 'im the shake, an' he wants to die! Must be so as he's come hyer of his own accord."

"Gents, the prisoner wants accommodation," suddenly continued Scar Chick. "In ther States they give a man a trial by jury. We kin do that hyer."

Trial by jury in that dark-skinned crowd would only delay the tragedy already resolved upon.

"Let 'im pick ther jury himself," suggested a tall fellow who leaned against the counter. "I'm for lettin' him hev full swing, an' we don't want court ter drag itself over ter mornin'."

This proposition was received with so much favor that Scar Chick turned to the young bonanza-trailer with a smile.

"Do you want it that way?" he asked.

"Suit yourselves," was the reply.

The tall man at the counter stepped forward.

"It suits us, Cap'n Scar Chick!" he exclaimed. "Stand back, gents, an' line yerselves across the shanty. This is man an' man. The Catamount from Bozeman will lead his lightnin' chaser inter ther corner yonder an' j'ine the crowd. I'm willin' ter trust him on ther jury; by Jupiter! I'll strain a p'int ter give Gold Grit a fair show!"

In less than five minutes the occupants of Happy Hank's den had arranged themselves shoulder to shoulder across the room from the counter to the opposite wall.

They were, for the most part, stalwart, broad-shouldered fellows with dark eyes and heavy beards or mustaches; but here and there was a dwarf whose revolvers conspicuously displayed in his belt made up for his short-comings in physique.

Gold Grit had seen these men on various occasions; he knew them all, their nature and their names. All were the friends of Reckless Roy, and but a few days before he had confronted them on the dueling ground with a short thread of life between.

If he had come back to throw himself into the hands of these men, he had performed an act of foolhardiness which they condemned themselves.

"The jury is thar," said Scar Chick, pointing at the line as his eye ran over it with a twinkle of grim satisfaction. "You will select six men from ther crowd, an' as you name each one he will step forward."

Gold Grit's gaze wandered up and down the line as he listened to Scar Chick's words. All at once his lips parted.

"Diamond Doll!" he said.

One of the little men stepped forward.

"Yankton Van."

A giant advanced, and towered like a mountain above Diamond Doll.

"Washoe Will!"

Another giant!

"Napa Nick!"

One of the homeliest men in the line answered to this name.

"San Rafael Rob."

A little fellow with a Mexicanish cast of countenance, stepped nimbly forward as if greatly honored by the selection.

A moment's pause followed the last choice.

Gold Grit's eye went over the line twice before he broke the silence.

The sixth juror was to be chosen.

"The Bozeman Catamount!" suddenly said the bonanza-hunter.

One-half of the crowd started, and a general laugh ensued.

The Catamount, however, came forward and

edged up against San Rafael Rob in a manner that increased the merriment.

"That's the darned fool that bored me to-night," muttered Scar Chick. "He'll give in a verdict with the rest of the jury, or Bozeman will lose one of its fixtures!"

"I have performed my duty," remarked Gold Grit, turning upon the boss of the camp when the jury had been selected. "This is the first instance on record of the prisoner picking the jury, but I am here for trial. I'll risk it with the men yonder."

"Sw'ar ther jury!" cried some one, and six hands went up in the lamplight.

"No!" cried the youth. "There is nobody here authorized to do that. I'll take the men without being sworn. Drop your hands, gentlemen," and all the bronzed hands went down.

One of the benches that stood alongside of a pine card-table was placed against the wall, and the mountain jury took possession of it.

The rest of the crowd drew off a few steps, leaving Gold Grit alone, though Scar Chick was not far away.

"This court is now open!" exclaimed the boss sport, bringing his closed hand down upon the counter. "Ther trial o' Gold Grit for ther death of Reckless Roy, one o' our most respected citizens, will now open. Ther jury will hear a statement of ther case by ther public prosecutor, which is me!"

As he finished, Scar Chick removed his hat, and ran his fingers through his long black hair, pushing it back from his evil face with its famous scar.

"Gentlemen of ther jury," he went on, stepping toward the six men on the bench, "ther pris'nar at ther bar came ter Thunder City a few days ago and met a man called Reckless Roy. Ther two met in this house near whar I stand. Hyer they had some words which got rayther hot an' a duel folliered. It war back-ter-lack an' then pistols at five paces. Thar ar' men hyer who saw it all, men who will tell ther jury that Gold Grit wheeled before the signal had all been pronounced, that Reckless Roy dropped without deliverin' his fire."

"We shall prove that for ten days Reckless Roy hung between life an' death, sufferin' from that shot which war fired too soon; that one night when his doctor ignorantly thought he war gainin', he cashed his chips at ther counter whar death pres des. We ask a fair trial; if ther pris'nar is guilty, we want justice; if innocent—an' how can he be, in ther face o' all this—let 'im go!"

Scar Chick stepped toward the counter and looked at Happy Hank. The glance was rightly interpreted by the bartender and a bottle came forth.

"I now ask ther pris'nar ther usual question," continued Scar Chick, turning upon the young gold hunter.

"Guilty or not guilty?"

Everybody in the house craned their necks forward.

The jury became deeply interested, and Gold Grit was the only person seen at that supreme moment.

Suddenly his figure was seen to increase in stature as he drew it up with a flash of pride in his eyes.

"As God is my judge, *not guilty of murder!*" he exclaimed.

His manner of speaking, with the emphasis thrown upon his last words, startled the crowd, and it had not recovered when he continued:

"I came here as charged; I met Reckless Roy in this place and resented an insult to my best friend. We went to the spot where, at the signal, I fired at the man who stood before me. He dropped on his face, was afterward picked up and carried to his shanty. For ten days he lay there under the care of a man who was known as Doctor Lynx."

"One night Reckless Roy died. I deny that he went out of the world at my hands. Before the living God, I plead not guilty to the charge that I killed him!"

The silence that followed seemed to embarrass the crowd, but as a dark scowl came down over Scar Chick's brow, he again struck the counter and shouted:

"We proceed with the trial, gentlemen, I call Anaconda Alf."

Our old acquaintance came forward reluctantly. He looked at Gold Grit as if to tell him as well as a look could, that he would harm him as little as possible, and he did.

Anaconda Alf retold the story of the duel; he did not know for certain whether the prisoner anticipated the signal or not, had heard men say that he did, and wound up by saying reluctantly that he believed Reckless Roy had died from the wound.

During the next ten minutes several other witnesses had the floor. These men had no scruples; they were positive that Reckless Roy owed his death to the prisoner, that he had no other enemy in camp.

It was all against the young myth-hunter.

"We rest our side!" cried Scar Chick at last, with a wave of his hand. "Let ther pris'nar call his witnesses if he has any."

A sudden brightness lit up Gold Grit's eyes.

"Flavia!" he cried.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STUBBORN CATAMOUNT.

THE pards of the "Red Divide" started and looked at one another as if the young bonanza-hunter had called the recording angel.

He might call Flavia, but would she come.

The door of the saloon was closed and barricaded with a bar of iron, and nobody seemed disposed to open it to any one.

The name fell upon Sear Chick's ears like a sentence; he flushed, then changed color and burst into a laugh.

"Flavia, is it?" he asked, looking at the young prisoner. "D'ye want ter drag her inter a mix like this?"

"I have called my witness. I want none other!" was the ringing reply.

Sear Chick beat back the refusal that started to his lips.

"Get the witness," he said to the crowd, and then under his breath he went on with a desperado's resolution. "By Jove! it 'll be worth her existence ter blurt out the secret hyer! I'll catch her with my eye the moment she comes in, an' she'll know before she speaks a word that I am not powerless among these men-tigers o' gold-dom!"

"I'll bring ther girl up," exclaimed Anaconda Alf, and the next instant the tall sport was moving toward the door.

He reached it just as it was struck thrice by some one outside, and when he had lifted the iron bar, the latch clicked and Flavia stood before the mountain court.

"She war out thar all the time," ejaculated Sear Chick, trying to catch Flavia's eye as she came forward looking at Gold Grit, whose presence in the jaws of death did not seem to surprise her greatly.

"She may tell now Reckless Roy died an' all thet just as she told me; but by the livin' king! she mustn't couple my name with the death!"

Flavia advanced to the middle of the room and turned suddenly upon the head ruffian of Thunder City as she threw a quick, solicitous glance at the youth.

"What does this mean?" she asked.

"Ah! don't you know?" exclaimed Sear Chick. "Gold Grit has come back ter stand trial for killin' Reckless Roy. He is now before the court o' ther 'Divide.' Yonder sits ther jury—good men an' true every mother's son ov 'em. We've heard ther testimony for ther State; it's all in solid enough ag'in' him, an' you've been called for ther defense."

"I?" cried Flavia starting back a pace. "Do you want what I know about Reckless Roy an' how he died?"

"Yes," said some one before Sear Chick could answer. "This court wants the thing sifted to ther bottom. Isn't this ther size of it, cap'n?"

"Thet's it exactly," replied Sear Chick who had been appealed to by the speaker, and then he turned the full battery of his black eyes upon the girl, and gave her a threatening look calculated to bridle her tongue. "Now, go on Flavia," he continued. "Ther jury wants both sides of this case."

The following moment the boss of Thunder stepped back and leaned against the counter with folded arms.

"I guess I've fixed her," he muttered. "She'll never give me away under these circumstances."

For a little while the fair girl seemed to collect her thoughts, and then in clear tones she began her story of the tragical death of Reckless Roy.

Sear Chick who had heard it before from her lips watched her with the eye of an eagle, and hung breathlessly as it were upon her words.

As her story grew the bronze crowd became intensely interested; the six persons seemed to forget their office, and leaned forward with their gaze riveted upon Flavia.

She told the whole story over, how the murderer glided toward his victim's cabin, how he opened the door and crept in, how for a few moments he stood over Reckless Roy and seemed to gloat over the crime he was about to commit, and how mercilessly he went on and took a life as coolly as a thug!

Nothing was heard in the improvised courtroom, but the clear voice of the waif of the storm—Zeke Wildfoot's protegee.

The gaunt steed of the Cute Catamount, one of the jurors stood, like a statue in his corner.

Sear Chick drew a breath of relief when Flavia finished.

She had told the whole story over, but Reckless Roy's name was the only one she had mentioned. His had not passed her lips, as if the look he had given her had been warning enough.

After the story the six jurors straightened against the rough wall at their backs, and Sear Chick looked at the girl.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"It is all I saw," was the reply.

"Gentlemen the witness has finished. I have no questions to ask. We'll let her story go for what it is worth, but you will recollect that six men hev testified ag'in' her. They say thet Reckless Roy died from his wounds, they saw nor heard nothin' o' this other play which the girl-witness claims ter have seen. Her evidence stands ag'in' 'em all, an' it is for you ter decide whether she is an interested party in this trial,"

and the last word seemed to be chased from Sear Chick's lips by a sinister smile.

"Any more witnesses, eh?" he continued looking at Gold Grit.

"I present the accusation of Doctor Lynx, who says that when he came back to Reckless Roy he found finger marks on his throat," he exclaimed.

"We can't take evidence o' this kind," laughed Sear Chick. "Ther men who carried Roy ter ther cemetery on ther mountain will say thet they saw no such marks! Ther trial is closed!"

This announcement brought an indignant flush to the young myth-hunter's face. He glanced at Flavia and appeared to wonder why she had stopped when she did.

If she had seen this man who had taken Reckless Roy's life, why had she not named him to the court?

Sear Chick was anxious to finish the play he was managing with the skill of a practiced villain.

He felt that the jury was ready to hand in a verdict without quitting the bench. He knew them all save the Cute Catamount from Bozeman, and he would have bet his head that that man would not "hang" the jury.

In order to give the proceedings some appearance of a court, Sear Chick requested Anaconda Alf to take the jury out when he spoke again.

He offered no charge as judge-advocate, or prosecutor, and when the six filed out into the night with the tall figure of Anaconda at their head, the spectators relieved from the strain, crowded before the bar for a drink.

"You kin take thet bench yonder," said Sear Chick, addressing Flavia and Gold Grit. "Ther jury will deliberate out o' doors, an' we'll hev its verdict before long."

The parting look which the girl received from his eyes ere he turned to the bar renewed the threat for silence, and she walked to the bench with the young gold-hunter with a cloud on her countenance.

"Flavia," Gold Grit said in a whisper, "your story was well told, but in God's name, why didn't you finish it?"

The girl gave a quick start and looked at him.

"The time has not come," she replied.

"Not when I am in the hands of a prejudiced jury and in the shadow of the noose as well?" he cried. "I came back to fight this thing out. I knew what you know before I started. I escaped from the watchful eyes of Ozark Oil who rescued me from the roughs of Lightning Lay-out. I was a coward when Doctor Lynx persuaded me to fly the night Reckless Roy died, but I have come to wipe out that stain! These men dare not lift a hand against you, Flavia. You have friends here despite the rule of Sear Chick and the hatred for me. I saw how eagerly the spectators and even the jury were expecting you to name the man who killed Reckless Roy; but yet you would not speak. After the jury has come in with their verdict of 'guilty,' it may be too late. Thunder City wants my blood, and the man who has stepped into Roy's boots wants it most of all!"

"Where is Lucifer Lynx?"

"Heaven knows," answered Gold Grit. "That man has told me that he was my friend, but he is not here now. He came back to Thunder City when he left me in the mountain cabin and played a game of his own against Major Sphinx. He is a detective who wants two men for a crime committed far from here; one of them he has taken away; the other remains."

"The other one is the man called Julian?"

"It is Julian! He is not here to-night, as if he knows nothing of these proceedings. But Flavia—"

"Hyer's yer jury!" sung out a rough, as the door opened and the tall figure of Anaconda Alf was seen at the head of the six.

Gold Grit pressed the girl's hand and gave her a quick look as he rose to his feet.

"These tigers don't carry out their infamous sentence," he whispered at her ear, "without a deadly struggle! I am armed for the emergency, Flavia, and my hand is quick at the trigger, as the pards of Thunder City know!"

Then he took a step forward, and waited for the buzz of conversation and the rattle of glasses to cease.

Triumph was laughing in Sear Chick's eyes. He looked at Flavia, and saw her change color under the glance.

"So ye're back with yer verdict, gentlemen?" he exclaimed, facing the six, who had arranged themselves shoulder to shoulder a few feet away. "I'm happy ter say thet ther court ar' ready ter receive it. Spit it out, San Rafael Rob. What do you say: guilty or not guilty?"

A smile came over the faces of some of the jurors, and San Rafael Rob was seen to shrug his shoulders.

"We've got no verdict," he said. "We're a hanged jury—five ter one!"

A murmur of disappointment swelled into exclamations of rage.

Sear Chick almost left the floor.

"Five ter one?" he cried. "I'll bet a thousand I kin find ther traitor!"

And the next moment he bounded toward the silent six, and halted like an enraged lion before the Cute Catamount of Bozeman.

"This is ther stumblin'-block o' justice!" he ejaculated, drawing back and covering the man with his finger. "This fool from beyond ther Divide is ther tree in our path. Look at 'im, gents. By Jove! we take the verdict o' ther five, an' throw 'im into the same cage that deals with ther assassin o' Reckless Roy!"

A loud shout of approval soared to the rafters of the whisky-den, and every eye was fixed upon the Cute Catamount of Bozeman.

He smiled defiantly at first at Sear Chick's threat, but instantly grew serious.

"I'm ther man, gents," he ejaculated. "Thar's five ag'in' me in this matter, but I'm hyer ter vote as I voted out thar—'not guilty!'"

"Tie ther fool ter his hoss an' turn 'im loose!" cried some one. "Send ther Catamount back ter Bozeman with an order on his coffin-shop." "Hang 'em both together!"

Goaded forward by cries like these the bronzed toughs of Thunder City seemed about to descend upon the stubborn juror like an avalanche. All at once he straightened before them all, his eyes flashed, he threw up his hand.

Flavia caught his look and sprung forward.

"This is the man!" she cried, halting before Sear Chick. "Before Heaven! *this is the man I saw!*"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MISSING FINGER.

THE crisis had come.

The boss bully of Thunder City recoiled without effort from the voice and face of Flavia, and the startled toughs who darted forward saw the girl draw her perfect figure proudly to its true height.

The arrow had struck home.

"This is the man!"

With her finger Flavia covered Sear Chick as she spoke and he was the object of everybody's gaze.

Something had to be done, and that quickly; the charge had to be met.

All at once Sear Chick broke out into a derisive laugh.

"This is a play not on ther programme!" he exclaimed. "You see, pards, thet ther girl had ter do suthin', an' she's done it. This shan't interrupt ther proceedin's o' this court. Ther jury has disagreed—five ter one, an' thet one no citizen of Thunder! We take ther verdict o' the majority. What is it, San Rafael Rob?"

"Death!"

"It couldn't be anything else," continued Sear Chick, and then he caught Flavia's eye and leaned toward her. "People ar' mistaken after night, girl. I am not ther man! Thunder City knows thet, for Reckless Roy never had a truer friend than Sear Chick. A charge like yours doesn't go down hyer whar I am known."

Flavia did not drop her eyes, neither did she start back from the glittering orbs of the desperate sport.

"I retract nothing!" she exclaimed, speaking firmly. "I saw the death of Reckless Roy. I was at the window of his cabin when the slayer did his work with the accusing eye of Heaven upon him! I would not falsely charge one with murder to save the life of my best friend. I have told you what I saw."

"An' I'm ther man, eh?" grinned Sear Chick, with the braggadocio of the bully.

"Yes."

"What does Thunder think?" cried Sear Chick, wheeling upon the crowd. "You've heard ther whole lay-out, gentlemen. It is said that ther blood o' Reckless Roy is on my hands—on ther hands thet once snatched him from death in ther Shasta kentry. Thar's no proof—only ther charge o' Flavia."

"And the finger-marks on the dead man's throat!"

The answer was in a man's voice, and the pards of Thunder City saw thet the Catamount of Bozeman step forward with trembling lips.

"What do you know?" thundered Sear Chick. "Ther yarn about them finger-marks was born in Doctor Lynx's throat, an' when he gave it ter ther world, he didn't attempt ter prove it. Do you step from ther jury thet you've disgraced ter take a hand in our game? Yonder's yer boss, Catamount; take my advice an' make yer anatomy scarce about these diggins."

The nondescript smiled.

"It's a question o' veracity," he answered, glancing at the interested crowd. "Does thet gallants of Thunder weigh a man's word against a lady's? Why should the girl tell a falsehood of the kind that sometimes takes a life on the scaffold? She says she was at the window when Reckless Roy died. Let me ask Sear Chick a question: *Where were you?*"

The boss ruffian started, despite his coolness.

"Flavia was outside!—weren't you in?" he went on with scarcely a pause, and the next instant he had cleared the space between Sear Chick and himself, and was glaring into the desperado's face with eyes that seemed to have changed color.

The stranger was the Cute Catamount no longer; in a flash, as it were, he had transformed himself, and it needed not Sear Chick's reply to announce his identity to the house.

"Great God! yot ar' Lucifer Lynx!" he ex-

claimed, and then with a rush, the whole crowd sprung forward and halted within three feet of the stubborn juror.

Flavia and Gold Grit stood between the Catamount and the door, his burly body partly shielding both, and with Scar Chick's cry, he drew back toward the youthful couple.

"So you think me a riddle no longer?" he ejaculated.

"You ar' Doctor Lynx, and Bruce Bartlett, too!"

"I am a trio in one!" was the decisive answer. "Men of Thunder City, the Cute Catamount of Bozeman is such no longer. I am Lucifer Lynx, the man who watched Reckless Roy ten days—"

"An' ther man who took Gold Grit between two days from justice!"

"Yes!" laughed the transformed. "I took the boy from the noose you had opened for him. I am also the man who showed you the bleeding rod, but I'm not playing magician now. Let me add my testimony to Flavia's."

"Let him lie, eh?" cried Scar Chick appealing to the breathless crowd.

"Give 'im a chance," said Anaconda Alf.

The boss of the camp ground his teeth, but made no answer.

"I repeat here that there were finger marks on Reckless Roy's throat when I came back to him after a brief absence that night and found him dead." Lucifer Lynx went on: "I am not here to say who sent him from the world, but I do say that on one of the hands that made those marks there were but three fingers! The dead man's throat showed this!"

Twenty men instinctively glanced at Scar Chick's right hand, and the boss of the "Divide" mechanically drew it back.

"This is pure bluff!" suddenly flashed the bully. "It's a scheme ter save the boy's neck by some o' ther tallest lyin' ever done in this camp! I'm ther man, am I?"

"Hold up your hands!" exclaimed the detective, and to the surprise of all a revolver suddenly looked into Scar Chick's face.

"Hands up! Let the men of the 'Red Divide' see if you have all your fingers!" he went on, looking coolly over the polished barrel that shone in the lamplight. "This is a game of life and death. It is being played by Justice also, and I as Lucifer Lynx am compelled to enter it at this stage. Elevate your hands, Captain Scar Chick. It is a coward who keeps them down in a case like this."

With the ire of a baffled lion Scar Chick suddenly lifted his hands, and all saw what they already knew to be a fact—but three fingers on the right one!

The crowd seemed to draw back—to shrink from the man who faced the detective's six-shooter.

"You will look at those hands, gentlemen," continued Lucifer. "You will observe that one of them has but three fingers—just like the hand that left its imprint on Reckless Roy's throat. I didn't see the murderer; remember this. Flavia has testified to seeing him; she calls him Scar Chick. I say that the slayer had three fingers and no more on one hand. Put the testimony together while you look at the hands above Captain Scar Chick's head, then let each man make up his own verdict."

Scar Chick dropped his hands without permission at the close of the detective's speech. He was white, but the spirit of a Satan cornered seemed to leap from his eyes.

"Try me! hang me on the lie of a man who is playin' a game deeper than ther ocean!" he hissed, turning to face the crowd. "Make a new court hyer. Install Gold Grit as judge, an' take the man with four names an' ther girl for witnesses! Let Thunder City get a name for infamy ter night that will sink it ter perdition! The schemer from God-knows-whar has taken advantage o' my misfortune. The finger I lost when I carried Reckless Roy half dead through the toughs of Snake Head Camp is turned ag'in' me. I am hyer, pards o' Thunder. Make Lucifer Lynx boss o' this camp. Hang ther man who has stood by it through thick an' thin!"

It was the appeal of a desperate man as the most ignorant of the toughs could see.

At the end of each sentence Scar Chick would strike the floor with the heavy heel of his boot as if to emphasize the fervid words he sent forth. The tiger of the "Divide" was showing his teeth when it stood him in need; he knew that he was appealing to men as desperate as himself, but men who burned to avenge the death of Reckless Roy on the right person.

A deadly silence followed Scar Chick's frantic harangue, and he stepped back out of breath.

"If I have been convicted, I am here!" exclaimed the young myth-hunter. "I came back to Thunder City to fight it out in some manner. Here are my hands, men of Thunder. Look and see if the fingers are all here!" and he held his hands toward the crowd with a latent twinkle of victory in his eyes.

"I move that we investigate," said a voice, and Scar Chick turned his head to see the lips of Anaconda Alf still quivering with the last word.

"Investigate what?" he cried.

"Ther death o' Reckless Roy. For one, I'm

not satisfied. Thar's a good deal of mixed business hyer—"

"By ther eternal heavens! Thunder City never investigates ther man who helped ter make it!" interrupted Scar Chick, throwing up his right hand. "I'm either guilty or not guilty now an' hyer. I kin transfer my allegiance; I kin throw my influence in a sartain scale across ther 'Divide.' No livin' men investigate ther conduct o' Scar Chick, late o' Serpent Ranch, on ther charge o' a man o' many names an' a girl. Hyer goes ther dust o' 'Thunder!' and he began to stamp the floor like a madman.

"We want ter be fair," ejaculated Anaconda Alf.

"Then play yer game through without me!" was the quick response. "I withdraw from all association with the pards o' Thunder. This night Scar Chick leaves ther town for other scenes. He may come back, though, but it will not be ter be investigated. It will be for justice—for vengeance!"

The man was nearly to the door when he finished.

He had reached the pinnacle of his insane rage, and the pards of the mountains stood speechless before him.

"Justice and vengeance—remember!" he cried. "I shake ther dust o' Thunder from my feet ter-night. I made this town—I own ther King Bonanza an' ther Princess Lode! I'm willin' ter give 'em up ter know that my word is nothin' ag'in' thet ov a mountebank from Sunrise. Good-by!"

The figure of a man sprung to the door and then disappeared.

An exclamation of disappointment rose from the lips of the men left behind.

"Let him go!" exclaimed Lucifer Lynx, throwing himself between the bronze pards and the open door. "You have a duty to perform before you move from your tracks. What is your verdict for Gold Grit, gentlemen? Guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!" said twenty stalwart ports at once.

Flavia uttered a cry of joy and sprung to the young myth-hunter's side, but the next instant her exclamation was followed by the loud report of a revolver.

Then came a cry—one that thrilled the occupants of the house—and Flavia fell quivering against the bar!

CHAPTER XXVI. THE BOTTOMLESS PIT.

Leaving the mountain den with a crowd of excited and swearing men pressing about the girl who had been sent headlong against the counter by the infamous shot from the outside, let us return to a man whom we have not seen for some time.

The reader may have been startled by the sudden transformation of the Cute Catamount into Lucifer Lynx when he saw the Wonder-Detective in his other role, of Bruce Barilett, the magician, march Major Sphinx from the Nabob's cabin.

Our return to the major at this juncture will enlighten the reader, and, at the same time, keep pace with the fortunes of a gentleman whom we cannot leave long unnoticed.

Major Sphinx knew that he had fallen into the hands of a man whom he did not want to encounter, and when he found himself fairly beyond the cabins of Thunder City, he began to despair.

All at once one of the spotter's hands dived into his pocket, and the next moment a cold touch at his wrist, accompanied by a quick snap, told him that he was linked to his cool captor by a manacle.

"I'm a common criminal, am I?" exclaimed the major, drawing back the full length of the short chain, and looking Lucifer Lynx in the face with a flash of resentment.

"You haven't been anything else for years!" was the answer, a faint smile appearing at the lips of the speaker. "It isn't often that we catch our New York criminals on the 'Red Divide,' major. Ha, ha!"

The Nabob scowled.

"You mean it all, then?" he exclaimed.

"Every word of it! I told you in your cabin that I want the men who murdered, and drove reason from her throne. I have found one of them; the other I will get by and by! You've been living well since I've discovered you. A year on the turf in Frisco, another year prince of a monte kingdom in the shadow of Shasta, and the rest of the time as Nabob of Thunder City, with your eyes on Gold Grit, whom you thought you knew the first time you saw him. Isn't this true, major?"

Major Sphinx glued his lips together intending to make no reply, but his temper got the upper hand.

"You're better than a ferret, curse you!" he cried, and then the major did stop, nor spoke again until Thunder City was far behind and the wild grandeur of the mountains about them.

Lucifer Lynx conducted his prisoner on and on, until he halted before a cabin which was so hidden by trees and rocks that at noonday its whereabouts would have puzzled the most acute.

It was evident that its existence was a surprise to the major, for he started when he saw it, and gave the detective a quick look.

"Is this one o' your retreats?" he asked.

Lucifer Lynx made no reply. His gaze was riveted on the mountain hut, the door of which stood open, and in front of it lay a long pine log or limb, the one which had fallen from the hands of the seven toughs of Lightning Lay-out.

Lucifer Lynx seemed to divine that something startling had happened.

He started forward with an abruptness that almost threw his manacled prisoner off his feet.

The next instant he saw the bullet-shattered door in the light of the moon that hung like a shield of silver far above rock and tree.

A cry escaped his lips; he saw that the hut was empty.

What had become of Gold Grit?

For a moment the Wonder-Detective seemed riveted to the spot by the calamity.

He knew nothing of the attack by the seven toughs from beyond the "Divide," nothing about the young myth-hunter's gallant fight for life, and nothing concerning the rescue in the nick of time by Ozark Oll.

Major Sphinx guessed what had happened.

"This man-ferret brought Gold Grit hither," he said to himself. "The boy is gone, an' it looks like somebody took him away after a fight, it does, by Jove! ha, ha!"

"Satan or his imps has played a game here!" suddenly exclaimed the detective.

"It looks that way."

"Do you know whom I expected to greet?"

The major's eyes twinkled.

"Ther boy war here," he said.

"Gold Grit! I left him in this shanty," was the reply. "This was one of his retreats. You see the door. It has been made a mark for bullets. It has been struck by a piece of timber, too. There has been attack and defense. Let us go outside."

Major Sphinx was bound to follow the New York detective wherever he went; the manacle forced him along.

Lucifer Lynx left the hut and began to examine the ground before it.

The Nabob of Thunder City did the same.

"There is blood here, as I thought," cried the man-hunter, glancing at his prisoner. "The boy was not taken unawares, and the enemy met with a warm reception. Time will tell whose blood this is."

"Mebbe it is Ozark's," murmured the major. "By Jupiter! I can't afford to lose that right bower at this stage of the drama. I'm in a pickle now, but while Ozark lives thar's a gilded chance. Ozark's blood here?—I won't believe it!"

The keen eyes of the Wonder-Detective seemed to read the history of a part of the struggle in the dark stains on the ground, and while Major Sphinx looked on in silence he appeared to solve a mystery of some kind, step by step.

When he rose again it was to turn suddenly upon the Nabob of the "Divide," and a bright light filled his eyes as he leaned toward his prisoner.

"All mysteries yield to time and perseverance, major!" he exclaimed. "I'll show you the clew to this one by-and-by. Before we go from here I want to show you something."

He led Major Sphinx back into the gloom of the cabin and struck a match along one of the logs.

"Look there!" he continued, pointing to some strange marks on a log. "What do you know about that carving, major?"

The Thunder City Nabob leaned forward and fixed his gaze on the singular sign beneath which were the letters "Z. W."

He knew he was being closely watched by Lucifer Lynx, but if he had not been he would have viewed the carving with the same astonishment with which he greeted it.

"It is all Greek to me," said the major, drawing back and looking at the silent detective. "I only wanted to know if you had ever seen anything like it anywhere."

"I never have."

Lucifer Lynx threw down the match which flickered on the floor and went out.

"We'll leave this mountain battlefield," he said, smiling on his prisoner, and the next minute the major found himself being conducted down a mountain trail in a faster gait than the one by which he had reached the place.

Lucifer Lynx seemed to be goaded forward by an eagerness which he could not control.

"If the boy is dead, woe to the men who did it!" he cried, through the teeth he held close.

"Even this shall not check my hunt for justice and vengeance. I have one of the villains in my power now; the other is back in Thunder City, where I will find him unless he takes flight at the major's misfortune. You've had a long string, Major Sphinx," and he looked at the man at his side with a smile, "and yours has been equally as long, Julian. But the hand of Lucifer Lynx hangs over you like a sword of fate, and by the eternal heavens! the game ends when it falls!"

Despite his apparent newness on the "Divide," the Wonder-Detective appeared to know the mountains like an old trailer.

He kept the narrow trail, now in gloom and now through stretches of almost snowy moonlight, till Major Sphinx stared at him in amazement.

"This man is a wonder!" ejaculated the Nabob. "If I had dreamed of this two years ago, he would not be threading these mountains, fastened to me like a cop."

At last the second stage of the major's forced journey came to an end.

Lucifer Lynx looked at him with a smile.

"The cabin we have left was one of Gold Grit's retreats," he said. "Now let me show you what I have in that line."

Major Sphinx said nothing.

After what he had seen of the man who had been in his power, he was prepared for anything.

"I'm an old citizen of the 'Divide,' major," he went on, the smile broadening on his face. "I never open a game without preparation. My palace of magic is under ground. Ah! here we are!"

As he finished, the detective reached out and caught a mass of large-leaved vines that grew in profusion over the mountain-wall, in front of which the pair had halted, and as he held it up he continued with a low bow:

"Walk in, major. The parlor of a spider is before you. You have furnished the fly, though a little against your will."

"By Jove! yes," ejaculated Major Sphinx, smiling in spite of himself, and then as if anxious to see the end of his adventure as speedily as possible, he went forward and heard the vines drop behind him.

For a few moments the blackness of midnight surrounded the major, and then a snap at his right announced a gleam of light.

The detective's match found something to continue the light, and soon the two stood in a narrow chamber, whose walls and ceiling were partly revealed by a tin lamp such as are found in the mining-camps.

All at once the free hand of the Wonder-Detective touched the Nabob's manacled wrist, and the next moment it no longer felt the steel circlet it had carried from the suburbs of Thunder City.

"You will be a guest of this hotel for a short time," resumed Lucifer, touching Major Sphinx on the shoulder. "Take three steps forward, major—there! Now look at your feet."

Major Sphinx looked once and drew back with a cry.

"Great heavens! the bottomless pit!" came from his throat. "Is this your play, Lucifer Lynx? I thought—"

"You thought what, major?"

"That I was to be taken back to New York."

"Wait and see. Now, sir, you will lower your body over the brink of your bottomless pit, holding on to the edge with your hands—"

"I?"

"Major Sphinx, of Thunder City!" smiled the detective, though speaking with inflexible sternness. "You will not find the pit bottomless, major."

"But I'm no rubber man."

"Nor are you made of glass, my dear major. Come! there are other things to be done. You forget that I am one of the sleuth-hounds of vengeance. Over the brink!" And the hand that closed on the major's shoulder forced him forward.

The Nabob of Thunder City shut his teeth and lowered himself carefully over the pit until he hung along the wall.

"Now!—drop!" cried Lucifer Lynx, bending over him.

The major shut his eyes and loosened his hands!

CHAPTER XXVII.

HARD TO BEAT.

It was after this adventure that Lucifer Lynx was at liberty to go back to Thunder City where we have seen him turn up in the somewhat ludicrous role of the Cute Catamount from Bozeman.

He had disposed of Major Sphinx for a time and knew where he would be found when wanted. Gold Grit was strangely missing, and the evidences of battle at the mountain cabin still alarmed the detective.

He went back and tried to follow the trail of the vanquished toughs, but the uncertain light that prevailed forced him to turn back.

He did not know that the young myth-hunter had fallen into the hands of Ozark Oil, nor that he had given the major's right bower the slip in a manner which need not be detailed here.

Lucifer Lynx resolved to go back to Thunder City, but not in either of the roles he had personated there.

There was yet another man in the mountain capital whom he wished to confront, Julian, the Spider, and then the Wonder-Detective believed that Flavia would draw Gold Grit back if he had escaped death at the hidden cabin on the "Divide."

The gold-seeker's unexpected return, the exciting trial at Happy Hank's, and its startling denouement were events unknown to the New York Spider who occupied one of the cabins during their occurrence.

"I'm no fool to take the trail of the major's captor!" ejaculated Julian, when he thought for the twentieth time of Lucifer Lynx's swoop upon the Nabob. "If he expects to win with the boy, let him play the game out if he can. By Jupiter! I see something better! There's a Queen o' Sheba hyer—right hyer in Thunder, an' she's worth more than the boy who has a lapse of memory which may never return. There is a million in it if we could play the game through satisfactorily, but there's a risk. If Flavia is the person I think her—if I only had those papers that got accidentally burned!—I will put my hands on something better than the New York fortune. Let the major go! He has dropped into the hands of Frank Hunter, the New York shadow, alias Lucifer Lynx an' half a dozen other people. Of course I'll have to brush him out o' my way first, but I'll do that. I'm still Devil Jule, as fertile in schemes as of old, an' nobody hyer—not even Ozark Oil, who knows me—dare interfere with me!"

If Julian could have known what was transpiring at Happy Hank's retreat while he communed with himself with a cigar between his lips, the cabin would not have held him a minute.

The wily desperado of New York had some schemes of his own, and his sudden indifference to Major Sphinx's fate had grown out of certain discoveries concerning Flavia which he believed he had made.

He was still an inmate of the cabin when the pistol-shot which followed the termination of the trial rung out on the night air.

Julian heard it but faintly, still loud enough to break his audible meditations, and to draw him to the door.

Lifting the latch, he opened the portal and looked out.

As he did so he saw a man hurrying across an open space before the cabin, and while he looked he watched him as he halted suddenly and turned toward Happy Hank's.

Then Julian saw that the person was Scar Chick, and that he held a cocked revolver in his right hand.

The moonlight showed the Spider this. "I guess they know down thar that I'm no babel!" suddenly grated the boss bully of the "Divide." "They kin take up with ther gold galoot an' his pard if they want ter; but by Jove! I spile things whenever I take a notion. I told her that she had better keep a still tongue, but she wouldn't! The girl's a fool! She would give me away afore ther court an' she got—what she deserved!"

The next moment the man wheeled and came on again. Julian instinctively drew back, yet he felt like dashing forward and checking the stalwart tough who had undoubtedly committed some desperate deed.

Scar Chick threw a quick and savage glance at Julian's cabin, but without seeing the Spider in the doorway, and a moment later had vanished.

"There has been an eruption," ejaculated Julian, seizing his hat. "What kind of a trial did he speak about? Flavia has received a token of his vengeance in some shape. I must know!"

The silken sport was soon on his way toward Happy Hank's, but he was not permitted to go far unmolested.

A mob of men suddenly confronted him midway, and he was instantly covered by a score of revolvers until it was seen that he was not Scar Chick.

"We've hed a holy picnic at Hank's!" exclaimed the man who led the gang. "Ther boy came back for trial, it turned out ag'in' Scar Chick by Flavia's testimony, an' ter git even, Scar Chick shot her down!"

Julian could not keep back a startling cry.

Flavia shot—dead!

Then the new scheme was falling to pieces already!

"Ther girl isn't dead o' course," continued the man. "She'll probably get over it—"

The sport from New York waited to hear no more, but told the pards that the man they wanted for his cowardly attempt at murder had lately passed his cabin, and then he bounded on toward the mountain whisky den.

Julian broke into Happy Hank's place without any ceremony, but the next moment became a statue of surprise before the scene that met his gaze.

Standing at the counter with his face turned toward the entrance was Lucifer Lynx, still in the garb of the Catamount of Bozeman.

His eyes were already fixed on Julian, and the Spider seemed to read his identity at a glance.

Flavia was not there and the absence of both the girl and Gold Grit told Julian where they could be found.

It would not do for him to back out and leave the saloon with abruptness; he had entered it with an air of eagerness which told that he had just heard of the trial and the tragedy.

"Thar's been a time hyer, kurnel," said Happy Hank, whose face had not recovered its wonted color as Julian came toward the bar.

"I've just heard of it. I wish I had been here—"

"Mebbe you could hev prevented it an' mebbe

you couldn't," was the answer. "This gentleman ar'—ah! yes!—ther Cute Catamount o' Bozeman." And Happy Hank waved his hand toward the Wonder-Detective, whose elbow rested lightly on the counter.

In the full light of the saloon's lamp the eyes of the two men met.

"You saw it all?" asked Julian.

"Yes."

"They gave the young man a trial, I hear?"

"They did."

"And acquitted him on the girl's testimony?"

"Partly on it."

"What stirred Scar Chick's blood?"

"Great Caesar! they got ther killin' enter him!" broke out Happy Hank, striking the counter with his fist. "It war worse than a cold deck! Scar Chick convicted himself by havin' only three fingers on one hand, an' when he saw ther Taunder war ag'in' him he went out, an', like a coward, turned an' shot Flavia. He's shaken ther dust o' Thunder from his boots, an' may ther moon be ice when he comes back!"

Julian waited impatiently for the barkeeper to finish.

"Is the girl badly wounded?" he asked, eagerly.

"Thank Heaven! she is not," ejaculated the detective. "I am not certain that Scar Chick shot at her."

"It's all one if ther boys ketch 'im!" put in Happy Hank.

Lucifer nodded.

"Where is she?"

"She war able to go home with Gold Grit."

Julian, the silken sport, frowned in spite of himself. It did not please him to know that the young myth-hunter was at that inoment with Flavia at her abode.

"I'm going to see her. Will you walk along?" suddenly asked Lucifer Lynx.

Julian started.

Already he knew that a common man from Bozeman could not be greatly interested in Flavia; there was certainly another skin under the one he showed to the New York sport.

"Yes, I'll go with him," murmured the Spider. "If I get a chance, I'll show him that I don't want any strange hands in the game I'm playing."

And then he looked at Lucifer Lynx and turned half-way round.

"I'd like to see the girl the monster shot," he said to the detective. "I came here to see Major Sphinx, but I'm always ready to take a hand in any game. I'm a free player, as it were. Ha! ha!"

And his laugh seemed to possess a singular significance, as he looked deep into the eyes of the spotter from New York.

Happy Hank wanted to treat the two men ere they left, a proposition which Julian was not willing to reject, but the detective refused to listen, and started off.

They reached the street together, and in the moonlight the Spider measured his companion for the twentieth time with his eye.

"I know this man!" he muttered. "There can be no mistake. I know what he is here for. The Cute Catamount of Bozeman is Lucifer Lynx, the sleuth who wants the major and I for that affair in Gotham. He's got the major somewhere and is back for me. Shall I go with him to the girl? Maybe he'll unmask me there. Then the game would be up!"

These sentences chased one another with lightning swiftness through Julian's brain.

He was alone with Lucifer Lynx in the moonlit silence of the mountain camp, for the mob which had thrown itself upon Scar Chick's trail was making no noise, and the night-birds seemed to have been awed into stillness by the crack of the desperate sport's revolver.

"A word, captain," suddenly ejaculated Julian, and as he spoke he halted, turning full upon the man who wanted him.

"You will pardon my plainness," he went on; "but when did you leave Gotham?"

The startling question told Lucifer Lynx everything. The mask was off; Julian, the Spider, knew that he was the man-hunter from the Eastern seaboard.

The detective allowed a smile to gather at the corners of his mouth.

"Why, Julian, I left New York when I found I was needed this side of the Rockies!" he exclaimed. "You will pardon me for my bluntness, but how long does Devil Jule expect to carry an unbroken neck in Thunder City?"

Julian could not keep his tracks; he recoiled in spite of himself.

"Never mind your old friend Prince Six-shot," continued the cool detective catching the glance and the hand that moved instinctively toward the sport's belt. "Remember that we are going to see how badly the angel of the 'Divide' is hurt. I want to thank you, Julian, for the bath you gave me in the Hudson one very eventful night. The cords slipped from my hands the moment I struck the water! It wasn't your fault Julian; you did your best. But let us move along. Flavia may be looking for us!" And taking the arm of the thunderstruck villain Lucifer Lynx started off again.

"This man beats Satan," grated Julian. "But wait! I'll match him."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OZARK SHOWS UP.

ALL this time a man was coming back to Thunder City.

He was footing it down the mountain trails eager to reach a certain destination, and all the time in no good humor as his clinched hands and flashing eyes proclaimed.

"By Jupiter! I'll ring his neck a little, major or no major!" grated this individual. "After wadin' inter the seraphs o' Lightnin' Lay-out ter save his life he gives me ther slip slicker nor an cel an' hyer I am goin' back ter Thunder with empty hands! It's a downright orthodox shame! An' I'm Ozark, too!"

Nearer and nearer this man came to the Idaho capital of the "Red Divide."

He kept on till he found himself in the camp, and did not pause till he opened the door of Major Sphinx's cabin and looked in.

The interior was dark.

"The paradise bird o' this abode must have flown," ejaculated Ozark with a smile. "Major, an' you hyer? I'm back with a rather doleful report, but mebbe—"

The silence that greeted him broke Ozark's speech and he stopped short and listened.

"Thar's one other place at which ter look for him," he went on as he stepped back, and muttering "Happy Hank's," he turned and walked away.

Happy Hank's was a good place to find anything in Thunder City, and the major's right bower strode into the place a few moments after leaving the empty cabin.

"Hello! when did you get back?" sung out Happy Hank himself, looking up from the long, necked bottle he was replenishing with some of Thunder City's favorite beverage. "You've come in just too late to see the circus!"

In an instant Ozark was at the bar.

He was all excitement, and his face almost touched the bartender's as he leaned across the counter.

"What circus?—what has happened hyer?"

"Hevn't you any idea?"

"No."

"Then I've got ter give you ther hull lay-out."

"I want it all!"

Happy Hank took a long breath.

"In ther first place, ther major went off with somebody who wanted 'im."

Ozark started.

"With whom? Be a little explicit," he cried.

"Well, with ther magician who came ter camp with a bottle an' a bleedin' stick."

"When did he come?"

"Since you went away."

"Well?"

"That man took ther major off at ther muzzle o' ther dropper. Scar Chick an' Anaconda saw 'im do it, but they never lifted a hand, for thar war double death in ther magician's eyes."

"Go on."

"Ther next thing o' importance ter happen war Long Lige's death."

"Killed?"

"Yes—found dead ag'in' Scar Chick's door."

"Great Caesar! why did I go away?" ejaculated Ozark.

Happy Hank shook his head.

"Then Gold Grit came back," he said.

"I thought he would!" cried Ozark before he thought.

"He had his trial awhile ago."

"An' war hung?" and Ozark Oil caught Happy Hank's wrist and almost pulled that worthy over the counter. "Tell me Hank—Did they hang ther boy for ther death o' Reckless Roy?"

"It war a close shave, too close for comfort," was the reply. "Nothin' saved 'im but some tall talkin' by Flavia an' ther Bozeman Catamount, an' three fingers on one o' Scar Chick's hands."

"Which means—"

"Thet they saddled the death o' Reckless on ter Scar Chick."

Ozark Oil did not evince much surprise at this remark; indeed, he seemed to expect something of the kind, for a smile came to his lips, and his eyes got a faint twinkle of delight.

"Scar Chick left us all ther dust he had on his boots, an' is no more a Thunder City meteor!" continued Happy Hank. "He had some o' ther old pards at his heels when he left, for he shot Flavia as aartin'!"

Ozark let slip an oath.

"I think he shot at ther boy," resumed the whisky-seller. "Anyhow, ther bullet sent Flavia ag'in' ther counter hyer like a loose rocket. They've taken her down ter her shanty whar ye'll find Gold Grit—"

"That's just the fellow I'm burnin' ter see!" interrupted Ozark, drawing back. "Down thar with her, is he?"

"Yes, and he's not ther only person you'll find thar."

"Who else is with her?"

"Ther Catamount, who turned out ter be ther doctor who nursed Reckless Roy—"

"Lucifer Lynx, the man who abducted ther major!" exclaimed Ozark. "What fetched him back?"

"I don't know."

"By Jupiter! I'll find out!" was the quick ejaculation. "Ah! what have you in this bottle, Hank?—death an' destruction, eh?" And before Happy Hank could expatiate on the good qualities of the favorite liquor, Ozark caught up the bottle, threw back his head and pitched down a deep dram.

The next moment, without more ado, he turned on his heel and was almost at the door when the voice of the barkeeper assailed him.

"You'll find ther major's friend thar also!" he cried.

Ozark looked over his shoulder.

"Julian, eh?"

"Julian!"

"I rather want ter meet that galoot!" laughed Ozark, and then Happy Hank was alone waiting for the next customer whose visit he hoped would be more profitable.

"So they're all hyer but ther major," cried Ozark Oil, as he struck the ground beyond the mountain saloon. "Mebbe he gave Lucifer Lynx ther slip somewhar in ther mountains, or praps ther doctor left him unable ter play his game out. If he did that—let him look out! Major Sphinx ar' no saint, an' I'm no seraph, but, by Jehu! I'm bound ter him by an oath, an' that is ter stan' by him through thick an' thin, an' ter hate his enemies as he hates them himself. This Lucifer Lynx is ther major's foe, an' I'm bound ter hate him, which I do, already! An' Julian! He'd jump out o' his boots if I war ter call him Devil Jule in presence o' Flavia. He don't want ter try any smart Aleck dodges on this mountain sage-cock. I hate every bone in him for those crimes that outlawed him in the North, an' he knows that I'm onter his true name. Let him look out!"

Ozark's lengthy strides told how eager he was to reach Flavia's cabin, but notwithstanding his eagerness, he came to a halt when he saw a light beyond the one window of the girl's abode.

"Mebbe I'd better exercise a little strategy," ejaculated Ozark as he drew nearer. "I think I'll get the lay o' ther land first," and he moved forward again almost on tiptoe and drawing alongside the cabin looked cautiously over the sill.

"I must be ahead o' them," he exclaimed.

"Hank said Lucifer Lynx an' Julian war hyer, but it don't look that way. Nobody in there but Flavia an' ther youngster who gave me ther slip arter I rescued him from ther toughs o' Lay-out. My hands itch ter tackle his throat jes' a little an' I said I'd do it, major or no major!"

Ozark Oil saw the fair but pallid face of Flavia on a pillow against one of the walls of the plain little cabin which had been her home ever since she had landed in Thunder City as the waif of the storm. To him the girl looked lovelier than ever, and her eyes sparkled with delight as they were fastened on some person who was talking to her at the time. Ozark looked again, following the girl's look and saw in a chair under the lamp on the wall and in the shadow of its tin bowl the figure of the young myth-hunter.

"Thar's ther varmint that slipped through my fingers!" grated the major's right bower, as he eyed Gold Grit ill-humoredly. "I owe you a good chokin' for it, too, my bonanza sharp! Nursin' ther girl, eh? I know, if you don't, thet ther major doesn't want you to freeze to Flavia. It'd spoil his game for a million, he says—I don't know how, though; but Major Sphinx ar' no fool by odds!"

Ozark Oil watched this scene for some moments, or until he discovered that Gold Grit was narrating his adventures since leaving Thunder City including his escape from Ozark himself.

"I don't want ter hear that!" suddenly cried Ozark. "I didn't come back hyer ter hear a boy boast how he beat an old hand like me. An' Flavia is laughin' at it, too! By Jingol it does her good ter hear how I got hoodwinked. I can't stand it—I won't!"

In a moment the big bronze hand of Ozark Oil was at the latch, and all at once in the midst of Gold Grit's narrative, the door opened and he confronted the pair.

The young mine-hunter left his chair with an ejaculation of astonishment which told clearly that Ozark was the last man he expected to see there. Flavia also let slip a cry.

"It war a 'mighty slick trick!" cried the big rough, coming forward, his large eyes dancing with evil triumph, and his big hands partly raised. "I've a mind ter twist yer neck, jes' ter show Flavia thet I'm no babe. Drop yer hands! I'm half-tiger an' half-devil when my blood's up, an' it's beyond bilin' pint now!"

There was something terrible in the look and attitude of the major's sworn pard, and the threatening look which accompanied the command to lower his hands seemed to drive Gold Grit to the wall beneath the lamp.

"Don't touch him!" cried Flavia springing up, the reddened bandage about her neck showing how miraculous had been her escape from death by Scar Chick's bullet. "We are not enemies, Ozark, and Gold Grit is my friend!"

Ozark Oil stopped in front of the young miner and looked over his shoulder with a light laugh.

"Your friend, eh?" he exclaimed, eying the girl sharply.

"My best friend!" was the answer, and the ruffian found Flavia's hand on his arm while he looked down into her lustrous eyes. "He has never crossed your path. The court of Thunder City has found him innocent of Reckless Roy's death."

"I know all that, but he gave me the slip arter I had rescued him from ther wolves o' ther 'Divide.'"

"It was to come back here and meet the charge against me!" exclaimed Gold Grit.

"But you euchered me—me!" persisted Ozark.

"I choke people who do that when I don't want ter s'arve 'em worse. Keep yer lily hands off, Flavia. I won't kill ther young mountain weasel."

"You will not touch him!" exclaimed the girl, and the next moment her figure landed between Gold Grit and the sport, and seemed to increase in stature as she faced him.

"Now go on!" she continued. "This is the person your hands are anxious to throttle. Lift them above your belt for that purpose, Ozark Oil, and we will open a new chapter in the history of Thunder City."

Major Sphinx's right bower recoiled with eyes riveted upon the girl.

He saw more than her flashing orbs; he saw what she held in her hand.

"I guess I'll let 'im go," ejaculated Ozark with a grin. "He ain't worth chokin' nohow." Flavia smiled.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OZARK GETS SOME INFORMATION.

OZARK was not very willing to forego the choking he had promised himself to visit upon the young miner, but he saw that it would not be good policy to carry out the scheme just then.

Flavia, fair-faced and triumphant, had planted herself firmly between him and Gold Grit, and the look in her eyes Ozark did not like.

"Has this man Lucifer Lynx been here to-night?" he suddenly asked.

"No."

"Nor Julian?"

"Nor Julian."

Ozark had remembered that Happy Hank told him that the Wonder-Detective and Julian had left his saloon bound for the girl's abode, and he was puzzled to hear that they had not reached it.

"Well, let 'em go!" ejaculated the major's friend as he stepped back and glanced at the door. "This man of many disguises played a slick trick while I war away. He came hyer an' took ther major off."

"Yes," said Flavia.

"Do you know I'll make him give an account o' that?" exclaimed Ozark leaning suddenly toward the girl.

"He may not accommodate you, Ozark," remarked Flavia with a smile.

"We'll see! I allow no Eastern sharp to git away with me," was the answer. "This man came all ther way from New York ter open a game, but he's likely ter go back, if he goes back at all, without his pigeons. I never did take kindly ter 'im; now I don't like 'im at all. Let ther future see what will be done! You don't want ter play any smart tricks hyer, young man!" and Ozark threw a mad look at Gold Grit. "Thet mine you've been huntin' is all gammon! You don't want ter forget that you're outlawed by Lightnin' Lay-out, nor that ther blood o' some o' its pards is on yer hands!"

"It was in self-defense. They charged me in the mountains."

"Make Lay-out swaller that if yer kin!" laughed Ozark. "Ther gang across ther Divide ar' bad medicine. If you want ter keep thet mountain jewel, Flavia, you don't want ter let him fall inter Lay-out's hands. Good-night!" and the next moment the door of the cabin closed behind the figure of Major Sphinx's pard.

"What's become o' Julian an' Lucifer Lynx?" ejaculated Ozark, finding himself in the starlight again. "Flavia thinks I won't face Lucifer the Second about takin' ther major off! I'm linked ter ther major by an oath—linked through thick an' thin. He can't play his little game out if Lynx keeps him somewhar. I want ter find Major Sphinx. Let me see, I'll have ter get at him through ther man what took 'im off! I know no other way."

Ozark walked toward the portion of the camp occupied by Lucifer Lynx while he was Reckless Roy's physician; he did not expect to find the detective there, but he knew not where to look for him with any hopes of success.

Suddenly Ozark came to a halt.

The shanty was before him, and a light in the window told that it was occupied.

"Mebbe I'm in boss luck!" exclaimed the Thunder City sport. "If Lucifer Lynx is thar, suthin' occurred ter turn him off between Happy Hank's an' Flavia. I'll see what did it," and a minute later Ozark drew up to the window and was looking into the cabin.

It contained but one occupant at that moment—the magician-defective himself.

Lucifer Lynx was seated at a small table which was partly covered with papers, some of

which were half burned, and all more or less scorched.

Ozark looked amazed; he had bargained for no scene of this kind.

Wholly unconscious of the presence of the ruffian at the window, Lucifer kept going through the fragments with the patience and skill of a thorough detective.

"Phar's suthin' in them papers for him," muttered Ozark. "I never heard o' anything o' ther kind bein' in Thunder save once an' they war ther papers somebody found in ther gulch a day or two arter Flavia struck camp. But them dockermments war afterward lost—so Flavia told me once, an' she ought ter know."

This being the case, Ozark's amazement grew as Lucifer Lynx bent over the fire-touched documents in the light.

One of them, a small paper not much larger than his joined hands, he held longer than usual, and Ozark saw his eyes get a new glitter while he studied it.

When he finished with it, it was to fold it carefully, and to place it in an inside pocket, an act which told Ozark that the paper was an important one.

After that Lucifer Lynx went through the rest of the pile with a good deal of speed. Paper after paper was examined, and laid aside.

"I'm hyer to know suthin' an' I'm goin' ter succeed!" ejaculated Ozark. "Lucifer Lynx may be a diamond that's hard ter cut, but I guess he'll yield ter my oil!"

Ozark went to the door with the last word, which was but a step, and a moment later his eyes were glittering before the detective.

Lucifer Lynx was looking for no visitor of the sport's description, but when he saw Ozark he leaned back in his chair, and gave him look for look.

"I'm back, kurnel," said Ozark, coming forward with a grin on his face. "Mebbe you don't want ter see me at this stage o' ther perceedings."

"To the contrary, I'm glad you've come!" was the answer in a tone that disconcerted Ozark. "You are Major Sphinx's best friend, I believe?"

"I am!" and Ozark's lips closed emphatically behind the last word.

"The major isn't in camp just now," continued the detective.

"No; an' they say it's your fault that he isn't."

"Perhaps," smiled Lucifer Lynx. "The major has changed his quarters for the present at least. How long have you known him, Ozark?"

"Ever since he came ter Thunder City."

"He took you into his service then?"

"Yes."

"Bound you to him with an oath?"

Ozark hesitated.

Lucifer Lynx had placed him on the witness stand, and was engaged in pumping him for a certain purpose of his own.

Must he submit to this process?

No, he would not!

"I am Major Sphinx's friend an' it's no difference ter ther world at large whether an oath unites us or not!" he said when he resumed in reply to the detective's last question.

"Oho! I see you don't like to go into details!" cried Lucifer. "Well, we'll take another path, Ozark. You see these papers?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever see them before?"

"That depends on what they are," answered Ozark, and placing his big dark hands on the half-burned documents he looked at them with much curiosity.

"You remember that certain papers were found in the mountains soon after Flavia came to camp?" continued the detective.

"Yes."

"These are the identical documents."

Ozark started.

"I thought they war all burned in Flavia's cabin!" he exclaimed.

"Some were pretty badly scorched, as you see," and Lucifer Lynx ran his hand over the papers before him. "They were preserved in this condition by a certain citizen of the camp, and when Flavia saw the work of the fire she believed that all the papers were destroyed."

"Who saved 'em?"

"Long Lige, the man who was recently found dead before Scar Chick's door!"

Ozark did not reply, but looked first at the papers and then at the detective.

"I consider these documents an important find," resumed Lucifer Lynx.

"Ov ther bonanza order?"

"Oh no," smiled the detective. "I'm not hunting bonanzas, Ozark. These papers fix Flavia's identity."

"Tell who she is?" exclaimed the sport, and his body seemed to dart toward the cool man at the table.

"They tell me a good deal," was the reply.

"By Jove! I always thought that girl war somebody!" exclaimed Ozark. "Ther man she war with—Zeko Wildfoot—never war her father. Anybody might know that for ther's gentle blood in ther girl's veins, while from what she told me about Wildfoot, he war no better than ther average camper an' gold-grabber. But what do ther papers say?"

"Not to-night, Ozark," said Lucifer, smiling again as he drew back. "You did not come here to hear about Flavia."

"That's Gospel!" ejaculated the sport.

"You know why I'm hyer?"

"Yes; you want information concerning Major Sphinx?"

"I do." And Ozark straightened quickly. "We ar' friends. In all my career, an' I've been no saint, Lucifer Lynx, I never shook a man who war my friend. I know what has happened. Major Sphinx is in your power."

The detective's eyes glistened, but he said nothing.

"You are a man-hunter from the East. Your hunt is connected with ther young myth sharp called Gold Grit. You know why ther major has been watchin' him like a hawk ever since he struck ther 'Divide.' I don't want ter know, for ther major's schemes ar' none o' my business."

"But what if I want to tell you?" asked the detective, eying Ozark closely.

"It's none o' my business, I say!" persisted the mountain sport.

"Yes, I am a detective," remarked Lucifer.

"I came here to help justice—to pay two villains for a crime committed thousands of miles from Thunder City, and before you had anything to do with Major Sphinx. I don't wonder that the major has watched Gold Grit with the eye of the eagle, nor that he sent you to the mountains to keep track of him. I am not surprised that he summoned Julian the Spider from his web in New York. Julian was here to-night, but he is gone."

"Gone?" ejaculated Ozark. "Did Julian slip through your fingers, kurnel?"

"I gave him what he wanted—a chance, and he took it," laughed Lucifer Lynx.

"Well, it's a good thing for Julian that he did!" exclaimed Ozark. "He war more than Julian."

"He was Devil Jule," said the detective.

"You know everything!" cried Ozark. "Let Julian go. I'm not interested in him. He was fetched hyar ter team with me, but I'd sooner he harnessed ter Satan! I'm mixed up with ther major. You took him off—waltzed him out o' camp with Anaconda Alf an' Scar Chick on deck. Did you come all ther way from New York for him?"

"For three persons, of whom Major Sphinx is one," spoke the detective. "Ozark, what are you going to do about it?"

The question squarely put and a little abrupt, seemed to startle the Thunder City sport.

"I repeat that I am Major Sphinx's friend."

"His right bower, eh?" ejaculated Lucifer Lynx.

"I'm nothin' less, by this rollin' planet!"

"Then, as his pard, you defend murder?"

"No, not that!" cried Ozark, drawing back.

"I can't do that if I am no saint! What did ther major do?"

"He stained the annals of a great city with one of the foulest crimes ever committed!" exclaimed Lucifer Lynx, rising and leaning forward. "This man whom you serve, and to whom you have linked yourself by an oath, is a murderer, and the destroyer of memory!"

"Great Caesar!" cried Ozark.

"Major Sphinx didn't stop at these deeds," Lucifer Lynx went on. "He is now playing a deep game for the fortune of the person from whom at one stroke he took that which is dearer than life itself—the faculty of remembrance! He was not alone in the crime: his accomplice has just left camp, but he shall not escape. Now you know who Major Sphinx is. Do you still stand by your chief, Ozark?"

"I guess I can't, kurnel. Ther oath kin go ter woodbine land!" was the answer.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN UNDERGROUND COMPACT.

THE reader will readily recall the circumstances attending the sudden departure of Scar Chick, the brutish sport of Thunder City.

He was not trailed by the mob of men who rushed from Happy Hank's saloon after his Parthian shot which sent Flavia against the counter. As he had outlawed himself by his acts, he was left to go whither he would, and the pards of the "Divide" soon came back to curse him around Hank's bar.

It was seen now that in Scar Chick's intense desire to sweep Gold Grit from his path, he had himself taken the life of Reckless Roy, hoping by this means to turn the camp against the young myth-hunter, but Lucifer Lynx's interference by forcing Gold Grit from camp, had upset the ruffian's plans.

A madder man than this same Scar Chick never turned his back on Thunder City. He knew he stood convicted of murder in the eyes of his late pards, and he doubted not that he would be hunted by the most eager.

Reckless Roy was a camp favorite, despite his bad qualities, and was, after all, a "better man" than Scar Chick.

Let us follow the sport-exile.

He swore roundly at everybody he had left behind as he kept down the narrow way leading from Thunder City to the mountains.

He dared not go back and face the camp as Gold Grit had done.

He knew he could not clear himself against the evidence offered by Flavia and Lucifer Lynx; and the dastardly shot! He did not know that he had not killed the girl, for he had seen her fall at the crack of his six-shooter.

There was but one thing for Scar Chick to do, and that was to keep his back to the Idaho capital of the "Divide."

The mountains soon swallowed him, as it were, and among their shadows he was completely lost to human vision.

But fate or fortune, time would tell which, was guiding the bully of Thunder City to new adventures.

The surroundings of the gold-camp were known to him; a thousand times he had seen their wild places, the deep gulches where the sunlight never fell, the dark spots where the bear, retreating from the hunter, found security; the many caverns that honeycombed the mountains—all were familiar to him.

It was not Scar Chick's intention to join the pards of Lightning Lay-out, therefore he did not turn his footsteps toward that delectable abode of the roughs and toughs of Montana.

He knew that he would be dropped on sight, if he should enter the Montana camp, for the feud between the two towns was as irreconcilable as sin and goodness.

No, the excited desperado dared not set foot beyond the ridge of the "Divide."

After the long journey over the winding trails of the mountains, almost lost here and there to the brilliant stars that decked the firmament, Scar Chick halted in front of a lofty wall upon which waved the large leaves of a mountain vine.

"I guess I've struck ther right hotel!" ejaculated the sport, laughing coarsely as he finished.

"They did turn ther tables on me completely in Thunder. Jupiter Jingo! it war unexpected, but I knew when I held up my hand arter Lucifer Lynx's story of ther missin' fingers, that ther dandy jig war up. I won't try ter pay yer back for that little game, my counterfeited catamount o' Bozeman! Oh, no! I'm one o' those forgivin' cusses what live on meekness. I am, by Jove! ha, ha! as ther major used ter say when he felt partic'larly good. Driven from Thunder City with a charge o' murder hangin' over me, eh? That's about ther size o' my present fortune! Boss no longer thar! I kin yet play a little side game thet'll make even ther tough pards o' Thunder City wish they led never found me guilty o' snappin' Reckless Roy's life-cord!"

As he finished, Scar Chick reached forth and caught one of the main branches of the vine, and a moment later he had revealed a dark opening almost large enough to admit him erect.

He did not look around to see whether he was watched by sharp eyes, but plunged into the opening and let the vines drop back behind him.

Darkness was before him, and for some minutes Scar Chick leaned against a wall at his back and rested.

"This is Hotel de Cavern," he observed, with a grin. "I'm proprietor, guest, clerk, servant—everything! I've had many ups an' downs in my life, an' some ov 'em hev been desperate close calls, so I'm not weepin' over this little episode. By Jove! if it hadn't happened when it did, I'd hev fixed myself solid with ther boys by showin' 'em that one o' Thunder City's present citizens is Devil Jule, wanted everywhar. He'll get ter play his hand a while longer, but one o' these times he'll see his mask drop like a warm potato."

Scar Chick, in the darkness of the cavern, talked thus and laughed aloud at his misfortune. He was a jolly exile, if he had a charge of murder hanging over his head; but behind his merriment was a resolution of purpose as stern as ever steeled the heart of a mountain desperado.

There are few saints among the gold and silver camps of the Wild West, and Scar Chick did not claim to belong to the few.

The laugh of the sport had hardly died away when a sound startled him.

"Mebbe I've got a guest, for all," he exclaimed, as he moved forward, with his hand against the wall of the underground retreat. "I've seen places o' this kind inhabited by some dangerous customers with tooth an' claw. Have I one ov 'em hyer?"

Every now and then the bronzed exile would stop and use his ears in the darkness.

"I'm nigh ther lower story," he exclaimed, at one of his halts. "I'll send a star down ter wake ther four-footed boarder up if he's hyer."

The following moment Scar Chick scraped a match along the wall, and when it was burning at its bight, he threw it forward and saw it fall twirling down, down through the darkness.

"Jupiter! what was that?" exclaimed a voice, at sound of which the exiled sport started. "A meteor can't drop through the solid roof of this cavern, and yet that was something like one. Maybe it was a match; but who'd throw it?—that's so, by Jove, ha, ha!"

"What! hev I found ther Nabob?" exclaimed Scar Chick. "Thar may be fortune in ther 'find' if he is hyer. That laugh nobody else o-

earth has. It b'longs ter Major Sphinx," and then the sport bunched half a dozen matches and threw them away, to see them fall downward like a little shower of stars.

"They are matches, by Jove! I know it!" rung out the same voice again, and the next moment the figure of Scar Chick was hanging along a dark wall, with his hands holding to the top.

"Stand from under down thar!" he called out, and then he dropped some feet, alighting fairly, and keeping his balance.

"Who are you?" asked a voice in the gloom. "Friend or foe?"

Scar Chick answered by striking another match and holding it before his face.

"Captain Scar Chick! by Jove, ha, ha!" cried a man who darted forward and halted before the excited sport before the match went out.

"Did you force Lucifer Lynx to tell you where I was? By Jove! I'd like to have his throat within arm's reach at this supreme moment. What a villainous place this is!"

"Why, it's a mountain hotel!" laughed Scar Chick.

"It's pandemonium!" grated the major.

"Wouldn't like ter sojourn hyer long, eh?"

"I'd die in three days!"

"Did yer come down their water stair?"

"No. I dropped, like you have just done, from above."

"Forced ter by ther New York sleuth?"

"Yes!" answered the major through his teeth.

"What has happened since I left Thunder City?"

"A good deal thet won't read to you like a prayer-book," smiled Scar Chick. "But, major, I b'lieve our interests ar' not ther same."

Major Sphinx gave the sport a look of wonder, and saw his face grow hard in the light of a lamp which he found in a convenient niche.

"It is to my interest to get out of here," Major Sphinx said.

"Ov course. You want ter go on with your game?"

"What game?"

"Ther one you're playin' for Gold Grit. Look me squarely in ther eye, major," and Scar Chick held the lamp close to the mountain Nabob's face. "No blinkin' nor crawfishin' now. I've not been blind all these years. Thet young myth hunter is a bonanza o' some kind for you, major, b t from what I've been able ter gather, he's ov no account unless he kin git his memory back. Now, ain't this about ther straight o' ther lay?"

Major Sphinx's face lost much of its natural color in the light of Scar Chick's lamp.

"Come—come! no lyin', major!" the sport went on. "Ther boy is ov no final account ter yer without he kin grasp all his past, eh?"

Forced to the wall, the Nabob let out the truth.

"This is a private explanation," he said. "My game is to see the young man restored to his fortune, but this cannot be completely done unless his memory comes back."

"Oh, ho!" laughed Scar Chick, his black eyes dilating. "You want Gold Grit to get some money that's comin' ter him?"

"I do."

"And ye're doin' it all from a love o' justice?"

The major nodded slightly, but did not trust himself with a verbal answer.

"I don't run across many justice-lovin' people like you, major," exclaimed Scar Chick, sarcastically. "But ye're liable ter fail in ther long run."

"How?"

"Thet boy has thrown his shadow across my sunshine. That's why I remarked awhile ago that our interests don't nangle ter any extent."

Major Sphinx looked puzzled.

"I'll explain in a word," said Scar Chick, came nearer. "I'm no photygraph, major, but I know a scraph when I see one. Flavia, ther storm child o' Thunder, occupies pretty much all ther heart I've got; but don't yer see? ther boy's between us!"

"Ah!" ejaculated the major.

"I hate thet young gold tramp, yer bonanza, like Satan hates holy water. Ther last big job I fixed up on him has just miscarried. No difference what it war, an' it war helped awry by Lucifer Lynx an' ther girl herself. If you could get away with Gold Grit wouldn't you leave ther Red Divide, major?"

"I'd go to-night!" cried the major, eagerly.

"You'd leave Julian behind?"

"If I could not get him away with me."

"Now, my proposition is this," and Scar Chick drew his figure up to an important attitude, while the major leaned forward so as to catch every word.

"If you will quit ther country ther moment you get Gold Grit in your possession, I will make this underground hotel cease to be yer abode!"

Major Sphinx could not repress a cry of delight.

"We'll say nothin' about Julian, nothin' about Lucifer Lynx," Scar Chick went on. "I will agree ter deliver ther young myth-hunter ter yer at a certain place if you will swear that he shall never turn his face toward Thunder City again."

The major thrust forth his hand.

"I see the need of a grand play right now!" he exclaimed, looking into Scar Chick's face, and in the lamplight the hands of the two men met.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WARNED AND DEFIED.

WHEN will you deliver the youngster?" asked Major Sphinx as he held Scar Chick's hand and looked into his eyes.

"To-morrow night."

"Where?"

"At the mouth of Golden Gulch. You know whar thet is?"

"Yes."

A thrill of joy passed through the major's frame.

"I will keep my part of the compact," he went on. "Is this trade to be broken to Julian?"

"No!" cried the exiled sport. "You don't want ter be bothered with the Spider now."

"Why not?"

"He is liable ter be exposed ter Thunder City as Devil Jule who is wanted everywhere. You sent ter New York for him, major, but he seems ter have a little scheme of his own on hand. When he heard o' yer abduction he never looked up ther trail."

Major Sphinx frowned.

"I have trusted that man," he said in low tones. "I know something about him that he would keep from the world, and by Jupiter! he must not give me the cold shoulder without cause. What did he do when he heard I had left camp, the prisoner of Lucifer Lynx?"

"He sampled some o' Hank's liquor and kept his head."

"The man seems to have abandoned me."

"Looks that way, major. Who knows that he is Devil Jule?"

"I do."

"Good! Can't you contrive to let the camp know it?"

Major Sphinx's eyes fairly glittered while he spoke.

"You don't know how I stand thar just now," smiled Scar Chick. "I'm not as solid in Thunder City as I war a few hours ago; but some-thin' might be played ter get ther pards on ter Julian. Do you want it done?"

"I do."

"But you are pards."

"Not now!" ejaculated the major. "Julian and I have drifted apart."

"Since when?"

"Since he left me tamely in the clutches of Lucifer Lynx, the detective! That means that he would rather play a game without me. Well, he shall! And before I turn my back on Thunder City, Julian may discover that I am dangerous when insulted in this manner! Why, I could hang that man!"

The major evidently spoke before he thought, for a moment after the words were out he looked like he would have recalled them.

Scar Chick looked at him with a merry twinkle in his dark eyes.

"Mebbe, major, ther same noose thet could hang Julian would endanger some one else," he remarked.

"By Jove, no!" ejaculated Major Sphinx, but at the same time he started as if Scar Chick had produced the veritable noose mentioned. "I am willing to let Julian play all the games he wants to so he doesn't interfere with any of mine. If Thunder City only knew he was Devil Jule!"

"Suppose you go down an' break ther intelligence, major?"

"Not under the present circumstances! We have made a bargain that must be kept. I am to receive Gold Grit at Golden Gulch to-morrow night?"

"That's ther pledge."

"At what hour?"

"Say ten, which might mean eleven."

The major bowed.

"He may quit the camp."

"He will remain!" answered Scar Chick, with emphasis. "He an' Lucifer Lynx think they've made themselves solid with ther pards, an' they will stay. Ther detective may come up hyer, but he will not find his mountain hotel occupied. We will steal a march on him. Between now an' to-morrow night we will complete our plans. There will be no failure on my part, major. I have never failed but once in my career, and thet war because I lost a finger some years ago. I paid for it awhile ago in Thunder City."

Major Sphinx did not ask Scar Chick to tell the story that seemed to hang on his remarks, and as the sport exile did not volunteer the information, the subject was not referred to.

Not long afterward the whole interior of the mountain cavern was dark, and not a sound arose to tell that it was inhabited.

Nobody emerged from it by the main opening, but for all this two men walked over a narrow trail not far from the spot, and did not halt until one, pointing down from a piece of table-land, called his companion's attention to a light that glimmered like a star, although it was hundreds of feet below them.

"Ther prize ar' down thar, major!" exclaimed the man with the outstretched arm. "Thunder

City is asleep, exceptin' Happy Hank's, whar thet light is."

"Why not to-night?" cried Major Sphinx, grasping Scar Chick's arm.

The desperado shook his head.

"I want time—time!" he said. "We've got ter hev hosses, for you can't walk Gold Grit ter safety. A day must intervene between to-night an' our ten strike."

"I will wait," was the reply, in the tones of an impatient man, and the major added in a low whisper to himself: "If I get Gold Grit fully in my hands, I can wait a month. I'm through with Julian, but there's Ozark yet. By Jove! I'd like ter hev my right bower at Golden Gulch to-morrow night!"

The two men passed on and left Thunder City to itself, and after awhile the last customer left Happy Hank's place and that worthy closed up and went home.

In the silence of the night, and when the star dial was denoting one of the lonely hours after twelve, a gaunt figure, human in shape, but with the tread of the wolf, entered the precincts of the camp.

It came from the east, or from toward the ridge of the "Divide," and found its way to the largest cabinless space in camp in the center of which stood a roughly-hewn pole about twenty feet in height.

The hatred existing between the rival camps of the "Divide" had been responsible for the planting of this pole, to which was nailed near the top a broad board, containing some liting insults to Lightning Lay-out.

The last appearance of the representatives of the Montana camp in Thunder City had added several new epithets to the ones already on the board, so that it was covered with such when the gliding figure reached the silent square.

It was an hour when the moon no longer gave the light which had silvered the ground since the appearance of the evening star, and the camp's visitor was not in great danger of being seen.

The man was almost tall enough to touch the top of the pole with his hands. He was nearly seven feet in height, with a body as slim as a lath, with a parchment face, but with two sparkling eyes to show that he was ever on the alert.

He walked straight to the pole and then dived one of his long, thin hands into a pocket behind his coat.

When the hand came forth again it held a piece of paper, which the man unfolded. Having done this he reached up and held the paper against the board, then drew a huge jack-knife, and with its murderous looking blade pinned the paper to the wood!

This proceeding, accomplished with great coolness, meant something important; the very actions of the gaunt individual were proof of this.

The paper was not as broad as the board, and the blade held it firmly, although the night wind lifted the corners now and then.

"Thet 'll rile 'em!" ejaculated the man, speaking for the first time, as he stepped back and looked at his work with sparkling eyes.

He said no more, but turned quietly on his heel and walked away as noiselessly as he had appeared.

Nobody followed him, no person went to see whether he had come alone into Thunder City with his paper and jack-knife.

Before long, however, almost before the strange man had left the camp, the stake in the square was approached by another.

This person could not reach the paper without climbing, and this he did not hesitate to do. In a moment the blaze of a match revealed the document and the big knife, and the bronzed fellow on the pole was reading something that made his eyes catch fire.

It was this:

"TO THE SKUNKS O' THUNDER:

"Look out! git or stay!
"Lay-out is on deck an' intends ter show up!
"Like death, we come when ye know not!
"Cowards run, brave men stand ther ground!
"Tharfore, Thunder City will be empty when we come!"

"THE PARDS O' LAY-OUT!"

These sentences, in big black letters and in poor spelling, covered the paper fluttering against the board.

"Jehosaphat!" cried the reader, dropping to the ground as his match went out. "Thar's no bunkum in them words if they do read bifalutin! It is what I've been expectin' these twelve months. Mebbe ther skunks 'll come to-night!"

The man rushed to a certain cabin and threw open the door; then, leaning inside, he called a name which brought two stalwart men to their feet. In a few words he told them all.

"Give 'em ther danger-signal!" exclaimed one of the recently awakened men to their disturber.

"All right, Anaconda."

The speaker straightened and inflated his lungs for a moment, and then let out a yell loud enough to rouse the "Seven Sleepers."

Twice he repeated it with increased vehemence; the nearest mountain passes sent it back in echo.

From every cabin somebody rushed, all stal-

wart men, who knew that the three yells meant danger, and in a little while the pole was surrounded by a crowd of ruffians, and one of the tallest was reading the warning and defiance in tones that exactly suited the occasion.

"What is it? What has happened?" exclaimed a beautiful young girl, as she appeared at the door of one of the cabins, and then she leaned forward and tried to catch the words of the reader under the board of the pole.

"It is a defiance from Lightning Lay-out," answered a voice so close that the girl started.

"Aha!" she cried. "It is you!" And then she looked into the face of a young man who smiled upon her.

"The pards across the 'Divide' are going to end the rivalry by a grand swoop," he continued.

"When?" inquired Flavia, eagerly.

"I do not know. The defiance and warning leaves Thunder City in the dark. Ah! listen! That is the voice of Brass Ben, the man who has stepped into Scar Chick's shoes."

Together the two young people listened to the man who was addressing the crowd in the square.

"We must send some one ter the hars' nest across ther 'Divide.' Thunder City must nail her defiance to ther door o' their boss saloon!" Brass Ben cried, to the approving shouts of the toughs, by whom he was surrounded. "Lightnin' Lay-out shall heer from ther Idaho pards! We will never run. This ground becomes our graveyard if Lay-out wins. I will write out ther answer, an' I'll give it to 'em red-hot. Who will carry it to ther nest o' serpents over ther ridge?"

A moment's silence followed and then a voice replied:

"I'm yer man!"

Another shout greeted the volunteer.

"Ah!" exclaimed Flavia. "That was the voice of Major Sphinx's old pard, Ozark Oll."

CHAPTER XXXII. IN THE SPIDER'S WEB.

THUNDER CITY was eager to pick up the defiant gauntlet thrown at her feet by her rival on the other side of the "Divide," and Ozark Oll's willingness to be bearer of the reply was received with cheers.

There was an immediate adjournment to Happy Hank's where, with the counter for a desk, Brass Ben wrote the answer which was received with boisterous applause.

Epithets of every description were heaped upon the Lay-outers, they were invited to Thunder City whenever it suited their convenience to call, but they were told to select their burial-ground before coming.

Thunder City would not run!

Not every man would be found at his post, ready to throw the charge of cowardice back into the teeth of the Montana toughs.

It was a strong but not very elegant document, and was consigned to Ozark's care with considerable rough ceremony.

It was not generally known in camp that Ozark had deserted the service of Major Sphinx, but such was the fact.

Lucifer Lynx's charge against the Nabob was too much for Ozark, who, though a mountain rough, could not sanction the highest of crimes by remaining the criminal's pard. The big, good-natured fellow had concluded to cut loose from the major, and his willingness to go to Lay-out was occasioned by a desire to do something for somebody besides the Nabob.

It is our intention to leave Ozark for the present after saying that with the defiant document in his possession and well armed, he glided from Thunder City and took the same trail chosen by the gaunt sport who had nailed the warning to the board.

For some time after Ozark's decision Flavia and Gold Grit stood at the door of the former's abode.

They knew that one of the most exciting events of the camp's history was to come.

The men who inhabited the mountain den beyond the ridge sent no foolish challenges. They would come as they had proclaimed in the paper, and it behooved Thunder City to sleep "with one eye open" as the saying goes.

At last Flavia held out her hand and bade her companion good-night.

The young myth-hunter looked up into the bright eyes that regarded him, and did not release the hand which Flavia attempted to withdraw.

"Flavia, Lucifer says we had better leave here," he said. "He is going away, never to come back, as he thinks."

"What! is his work done?" exclaimed the girl. "I know he has caught one of the men he wanted, but the other, Julian, is yet at large."

"He has not given Julian up," was the reply.

"Julian slipped through his fingers awhile ago, but it was because he gave him an opportunity."

"Why did he do this?"

"He would not tell me."

"You asked him?"

"I did. He says that Major Sphinx is not less guilty than Julian. It is very strange."

"What crime is this for which Lucifer Lynx wants these two men?" asked Flavia eagerly.

Gold Grit shook his head.

"Did you ever think it might concern you?"

The young miner started violently, and then came forward suddenly with dilated eyes.

"What do you mean, Flavia?" he exclaimed.

"Did I ever think that the crime of the two pards is somehow-or-other connected with my life? In God's name, never! It cannot be! I never saw either to my knowledge until I met them here—the major several years ago, Julian lately. No, their crime in no way concerns me. I have just crossed Lucifer Lynx's path accidentally, yet he has asked me many questions about my loss of memory. But what prompted your startling question, Flavia?"

"I can hardly tell you," was the answer.

"This Lucifer Lynx is a strange man."

"Strange and keen!" ejaculated the myth-hunter. "He told me on the way to my mountain cabin that there was a bigger bonanza for me than the one I've been looking for among the mountains. He said it was near the sea; but that it could not be touched until the past came back to me. After that he held his tongue as if he had talked too much."

Flavia was dwelling with breathless eagerness upon the words as they fell from the youth's lips.

"He told you that much, did he?" she exclaimed.

"Yes."

The girl was for several moments silent.

"You want to see what they are doing about the challenge down at Happy Hank's," she said, when she spoke again. "I hope I have not mystified you with my question. It came to my lips without effort; let it go for naught. Good-night!"

This time Gold Grit did not get a chance to detain the waif of the storm, for Flavia drew back into the cabin and he found himself alone in the night.

"There is something that mystifies me!" exclaimed Gold Grit stopping suddenly. "The girl's question went through my brain like a flash. Am I Gold Grit and nothing else? Why is my youth a blank, and why do I sometimes see three shadows in my dreams? I have a past, but what is it like? Does Lucifer Lynx know? By heavens! if he does he must tell me!"

When Gold Grit started off again it was toward the detective's cabin, and a few moments later he opened the door without the ceremony of a single rap.

A lamp burning on the table told the young man that the cabin was at that moment untenanted.

Perhaps Lucifer Lynx made one of the party at Happy Hank's, where Brass Ben was drawing up the manifesto against the pards of Lightning Lay-out.

Gold Grit stood in the cabin undecided.

If he waited, Lucifer would come back, and his cabin was the proper place to confront him about the mystery so near his heart.

The myth-hunter at length took a chair, and resolved to meet the Wonder-Detective on his return.

If he had known what was occurring at Flavia's cabin at that moment, Lucifer's abode would not have held him a second.

Let us retrace our steps.

Flavia, the storm child, expected no visitor when she closed the door after bidding Gold Grit good-night.

It had hardly shut ere it was opened by some one from the outside.

"Flavia!"

The girl turned with a start at the sound of her name, and the next second she went toward the wall at her back with her eyes riveted in amazement on the person who stood before her.

"I thought you—"

Flavia broke her own sentence and stared anew at the man.

"You thought I had left camp, eh, Flavia?" laughed the visitor, folding his arms as he spoke, and leaning lightly against the rough frame of the door. "Well, I did go away, but I am back again. I came back to see you! Bright eyes, you know, possess an irresistible charm. Ha! ha!"

Flavia flushed and gave the man a look of resentment.

"I did not expect this visit," she replied.

"No, of course not. I may not be welcome, but I cannot help that. I thought you told me once that the papers found in the ravine after that great storm were burned?"

"They were," cried the girl, promptly.

"Are you certain of this?"

"I am as certain as I can be. I came back to the cabin just after Long Lige had put out the little fire, and he showed me the ashes—the documents."

"Of all of them?"

"He said so."

"Flavia!" cried the man coming forward, a new light in his eyes. "Those papers still exist in part. They concern you more than you think!"

The girl laughed.

"What do I care, Julian?" she exclaimed.

"I've been only Flavia so long that I don't want to be anybody else."

"You may be some heiress."

"No! not that!" exclaimed the girl again, and then she became serious, and asked:

"Have you seen those papers?"

"Some of them," was the quick response.

"Where are they?"

"Where they will do you great good some of these days."

Flavia held out her hand.

"Let me see them."

Julian the Spider drew back.

"Not now, nor here!" he cried. "You do not know that I can make you queen of a kingdom that outshines any in this country. It is in my power to do so."

"Then I am not the child of the Wildfoots?" exclaimed Flavia with a smile.

"Great Jupiter, no! If I thought you were, I would not be here to-night. You are out of your sphere in this mountain den. I am not the desperate man whom Lucifer Lynx has probably painted for you. You want a better place than this. You deserve a palace, not a cabin. You deserve to reign queen of millions, not serve or slave in Thunder City."

"Slave? I am no slave!" and Flavia came forward, rendered more beautiful than ever by the insulted dignity she exhibited. "This is but one of the hard camps of the 'Divide,' and man is half-savage here; but I am free—freer than I would be, perhaps, in the kingdom you have formed for me!"

"By Heaven! must I seat you on the throne by force?" cried Julian. "I am going away again, but this time not alone. I didn't know you were in existence when I came hither; but I wasn't long finding you out. Ah! don't retreat further, girl! You can't push yourself through those logs, for they are solid!"

The next moment Julian darted forward with the agility of the panther, and his right hand closed on one of Flavia's wrists.

"Be docile!" he cried, looking down into her face. "This game is for both of us. You are going away from Thunder City to-night—now!—going to your kingdom, Flavia, ha, ha!"

He seemed to transfix the girl with his look and she appeared to have lost her powers of life; she stood like a beautiful statue before him.

"Come!" he went on. "There is to be no violence of any kind. I am Julian, the queen-finder. Let Major Sphinx play his game out himself if he escapes Lucifer Lynx. This is distinctly my game, Flavia. By Jove! I never held a hand like this before. Ah! we are off now. No noise, no hesitation! I've run many a risk for sparkling eyes, but never one as pleasant as this!"

He started toward the door with Flavia speechless in his grip, and a moment later he caught the latch and threw it open.

The following minute the little cabin was empty, and Julian the Spider had made a startling play.

CHAPTER XXXIII. CHEATED JUSTICE.

MEANWHILE Gold Grit, seated in the cabin occupied by Lucifer Lynx, was impatiently waiting for the detective's return.

He knew nothing about the cool game we have just seen Julian play at Flavia's cabin, else the magic-detective's abode would not have held him a second.

The young myth-hunter was anxious to pry into the mystery of which he seemed the center; he now believed that Lucifer Lynx knew something about his early life, and Flavia had filled his head with startling thoughts.

Was he connected in some manner with the crime which Julian and Major Sphinx had committed far from Thunder City and near the Eastern sea?

It was not improbable, but when Lucifer should come he would know all.

All at once the youth was startled by a foot-step beyond the door, and the next moment Lucifer Lynx stood before him.

"Hol you are here, eh?" exclaimed the detective; "I stopped at your shanty as I came along, but found it empty. There's war between the two camps now. Thunder City is going to send defiance across the ridge. The messenger has departed."

"Who is he?"

"Ozark Oll."

"It takes a brave man to carry a message of that kind to Lightning Lay-out, and the pards there have no love for Ozark after what he did for me at the siege of the mountain cabin."

"Ozark is able to take care of himself," added the detective with a smile. "I would like to see Lightning Lay-out and Thunder City meet on equal terms but I cannot as we are going away."

"When?" asked the youth with eagerness.

"Perhaps to-morrow night."

"For the East?"

Lucifer Lynx gave Gold Grit a singular look at this question.

"Why to the East do you think?" he said, coming forward and dropping into a chair with the table between them.

"The time has come," thought the young gold-hunter, and then his hand darted across the table and landed on the detective's wrist while he looked him steadily in the eye.

"I know just enough to want to know all," he went on.

"Enough about what?"

"About myself."

Lucifer Lynx leaned back and laughed while the youth colored and looked at him with rising indignation.

"Wait till I show you something, boy!" he suddenly exclaimed, as he grew serious, and the next moment Gold Grit saw him bending over the blanket pillow of a cot in one corner of the room.

"Great God! what thief has been here?" exclaimed the detective, staggering back and turning a colorless face to the myth-hunter who had almost been startled from his chair by the exclamation.

"What has been taken?"

"Something valuable you can believe," and then Lucifer Lynx went back to the cot and searched again.

It was in vain; nothing rewarded his hot hands.

"How long have you been here?" he cried, wheeling upon Gold Grit.

"About an hour."

"The thief was here before that!" Lucifer Lynx went on. "Gold Grit, my boy, I had a few papers under the couch—papers that were worth their weight in gold, not to me but to another!"

"To me?" cried the young mountaineer, eagerly.

"Not to you!" was the answer.

"Then to—"

"To Flavia!" interrupted the detective. "But the most important paper of the lot I still possess. If I had by the throat the man who robbed me, he would never play out his little game!"

"Whom do you suspect?"

The New York spotter was silent for a moment.

"Ozark saw the papers in my hands," he resumed, reflectively, "but he did not steal them. There is one person who is deeply interested in Flavia—deeply so besides you, Gold Grit; but did he come back?"

The youth did not reply.

"That man took the documents!" cried Lucifer. "It is the first time in my life that I have been robbed, and to be robbed by him—by Jupiter! it maddens me! I got those papers to-night; he must have seen them in my possession."

The detective came back to the table as he finished, but his eye wandered more than once to the empty nest.

"Now I am ready to talk to you, Gold Grit," he said to the myth-hunter when he spoke again. "I will soon have my hands on the thief, for I came across the continent to show him once more the face of Lucifer Lynx, the Gotham Ferret! What do you want to know? Ah, yes! something about yourself!"

The deep, dark eyes of the gold youth fairly sparkled as he leaned forward, burning to catch the first word as it should fall from the detective's tongue.

Lucifer Lynx saw his eagerness and smiled.

"Your recollection goes back but a few years, I believe?" asked Lucifer.

"Yes. I have told you this."

The detective nodded.

"The first memory is of the mountains?"

"San Francisco and then the Red Divide."

"Nothing about New York?"

"No."

"Nothing about home, father, mother, wealth—nothing of that kind?"

"Nothing!"

"You have always been Gold Grit, eh?"

"Always," answered the myth-hunter, with a smile.

"No, not always!" exclaimed the detective, in altered tones, as he leaned toward the young man. "You used to be Jasper Jalien."

"What a strange name!" ejaculated the myth-hunter.

"There was but one other person in New York who bore it, and he was your father."

"Where is he now?"

Lucifer Lynx recoiled at the question.

"Do you really want to know?" he asked.

"Why not?" was the quick response. "I have asked you for all the past, and I will be content with nothing less. Go on. Where is my father?"

"He is dead!"

The young gold-hunter started, but not violently, as if the revelation was half-expected.

"Your father was one of the wealthy men of New York—a banker who was known almost everywhere," continued the detective. "One night two men entered his home, bent on forcing from him a large amount of money. They came with the stealth of practiced house-breakers, though only one of them had a reputation of that kind. They unexpectedly found your father up and in his library—but the discovery did not deter them. At an hour when he thought of no danger the door was flung open and they were upon him. Oscar Jalien was a powerful

man, and almost a match for the twain. The struggle in the library must have been terrific, for it awakened a young man who slept on the third floor, and he rushed down to see what was going on. When he reached the door he was seen by one of the men and was dealt a terrible blow on the head."

"Was it here?" asked Gold Grit, placing a finger on a certain scar which he carried over the left temple.

Lucifer Lynx nodded slightly as he went on:

"The crime of that night stirred every part of the city; the men escaped, but Oscar Jalien lay in his library dying, and his son was unconscious. The father died, but the son lived; but memory had fled."

The young myth-hunter was about to speak, when the detective raised his finger for silence.

"Let me finish; you want it all, you say," he went on. "After the funeral, Jasper Jalien, the son, was placed in a hospital for treatment, but the best physicians could not restore him. All at once he turned up missing, and from that day to this New York has lost sight of him. The two men were not run down by the detectives who tried to work up the case. There was but little clue to them. Nobody had seen them in the house but the Jaliens, father and son, and one was dead and the other had lost the faculty of remembering. So you see what we had to work on."

"I see!" exclaimed the myth-hunter, pressing both hands against his head. "It all lies with me. If I could recall the events of that night, I could identify the two men."

"That is it!" cried Lucifer Lynx.

"Even if I should drag them to the bar of justice they would escape for want of evidence. It needs your oath, Jasper. If Sear Chick had scraped you with his infamous bullet as he did Flavia, it might be different now."

"Ah! I understand," ejaculated Gold Grit. "You think a sudden blow on the head will restore my memory. What have you here?" and the youth sprang up and looked around the room.

Lucifer Lynx watched him with curiosity and eagerness.

"You have this," cried Gold Grit, wrenching a heavy wooden pin from a log. "Here I am. Deal as hard a blow as you like, Lucifer Lynx! I have a debt of vengeance to pay. I want to recall the past, my home and my parents. And then I want to stand face to face with the men who more than murdered that infamous night."

"No, I can't do that," and the magician detective shrunk from the pin which the young man extended. "The blow might be death."

"I'll take the risk!"

But Lucifer Lynx resolutely shook his head, and waved Gold Grit back to his chair.

"I am going to court the stroke," the youth said. "I will risk it killing me. But who are the suspected men?"

"Major Sphinx and Julian."

"I could have guessed it," was the answer. "Ah, I see. The courts will not condemn them without my evidence?"

"Not without it," answered Lucifer.

For a moment the gold-hunter seemed crushed into silence by the aspect before him, then with a wild cry he bounded from his chair and threw his right hand aloft.

"I call on Heaven to right the past by giving me my lost memory," he exclaimed. "Justice wants her own, and I am the person who can make it all even. Send a bolt—a lightning stroke—"

The sentence was never finished, for all at once there came the crash of glass, and Gold Grit staggered against the cabin logs with a strange groan!

Lucifer Lynx seemed lifted from his seat by the startling occurrence.

Was it really a bolt from heaven?

When the detective recovered he bounded to where the myth-hunter lay against the wall; he picked up the lamp and held it over him.

"Heavens! he is dead!" he cried.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN ANXIOUS DAY.

THE morning broke clear and fresh after the eventful night for Thunder City.

On a cot in the cabin occupied by Lucifer Lynx lay the motionless figure of Gold Grit.

The young myth-hunter's head was heavily bandaged and the shattered window still told from whence the terrible bolt had come.

Near the table sat a man whom we have met before.

It was Anaconda Alf, and he and Gold Grit were the only occupants of the cabin.

"I don't know who made a thunderbolt out of that piece of quartz yonder," murmured Anaconda, bestowing a glance on a large rock lying on the table, "but I guess I hev a pretty fair idee! Lucifer Lynx says it came in at ther winder like a cannon-ball. Wal, it hit its target," and here the speaker looked at the youth on the couch. "It's a wonder it didn't kill 'im; struck a little too high, Lucifer says, an' right on top o' that he says mebbe we'll hev ter thank ther man what launched that bowlder! We'll hev ter wait." And

Anaconda subsided into silence and went to the window.

Lucifer Lynx was not in camp at that moment.

Julian's play had been discovered and the New York spotter had left Gold Grit in care of Anaconda Alf while he had taken to a new trail.

It was long after daylight before the young myth-hunter opened his eyes. This first movement drew the bronzed watcher to his side, and as the old sport knelt down Gold Grit put forth a hand.

"Ah! it is you, Anaconda!" he exclaimed, and then he tried to pass his hand over his forehead. "Where is Lucifer?"

Anaconda Alf had an answer ready.

The young miner was to know nothing of the detective's new hunt.

"He'll be in by-an'-by," he replied.

The myth-hunter shook his head.

"I want him now. It has all come back!"

"What has?" exclaimed the tall sport.

"The lost weeks, months and years!" was the answer.

"Jebu! glory!" burst from Anaconda's throat. "You don't say it's all back—ther hull lay-out?"

Gold Grit smiled.

"The whole thing, but I am going to keep it for Lucifer."

"Wal, I kin wait for it," remarked the old man, drawing back. "Lucifer will come sooner if you will go ter sleep ag'in—that is, it won't seem so long."

"But Flavia?"

"She'll come with Lucifer."

The youth appeared satisfied though it was true that his impatience had not been curbed, and turning his face to the rough wall of the shanty, he was soon in another deep slumber which gladdened old Anaconda's eyes.

For several moments the rough but soft-handed nurse watched him tenderly and then drew back with the gentleness of a woman.

During that day Anaconda had to answer many questions about the young myth-hunter.

Every now and then a bronze face would appear at the shattered window, and its owner would inquire after the occupant of the cot.

The parads of Thunder City seemed to know who had launched the heavy quartz nugget through the window, and when they spoke of him they would do so through clinched teeth.

Woe to him if he should fall into their hands!

Ozark Oil had set out upon his dangerous mission, and the parads of the "Divide" were anxious to know what he would accomplish.

Lightning Lay-out lay just beyond the backbone of the "Divide," and Ozark, if lucky, would soon reach the camp. The defiance drawn up by Brass Ben was well calculated to fire the Montana heart, and it was expected that Ozark would report some time during the day.

Thus, with waiting in Happy Hank's saloon and on the irregular streets of the gold camp, the anxious parads passed the day.

The sun never set slower to them, for as the afternoon wore away, it was agreed that night would certainly bring Ozark and his report.

Thanks to the contents of a small vial which Lucifer Lynx had left, Gold Grit or Jasper Jalien as we can now call him, slept through the seemingly endless day.

Anaconda Alf leaned against the door of the cabin and saw night come on again.

He knew that the parads had reassembled at Happy Hank's to receive Ozark's report, but he also looked for the Gotham Detective.

Had he found Flavia, or had the man who had played his game eluded him altogether?

Anaconda was impatient and full of fears.

Star after star came out and found him still at the door with ears and eyes on the alert, too.

What had become of Flavia?

We saw her last in the grip of Julian the Spider, the sleek desperado who could laugh and throttle a person at one and the same time.

There was no escape for the girl, and as he led her from her cabin, his look told her that policy lay in silence.

"I'll make you queen of a bonanza against your will, if no other way!" he exclaimed.

"Didn't I tell you awhile ago that I have the documents? Zeke Wildfoot's child, eh? Not much o' it! Haven't you got a tattoo—something like a monogram—on you somewhere, Flavia?"

The girl drew back the length of his arm, and gave him a stare.

"Ah, I thought so!" he ejaculated. "It'll clinch the proof I have, and you will enter into possession of your kingdom without any difficulty. I've cut loose from that old fool Major Sphinx; we are quits forever. He can play his game out if Lucifer Lynx will let him, and I will play mine. I found you just in time. After all, my ride across the continent is no wild-goose chase."

Flavia was forced to listen to expressions like these while she was led through the camp by the Spider.

At the edge of it she was made aware of the fact that Julian had not made his swoop without preparation.

He led her to two horses already saddled for

a ride, and almost before she could give him a look of remonstrance, she was on one of the saddles and he had clutched the bridle rein.

"This is the last of Thunder City for you, girl!" Julian exclaimed. "The kingdom in the mountain is to be exchanged for one where people are civilized."

"What do you expect to gain by all this?" was the quick retort, and Flavia's eyes scintillated as she leaned toward Julian with the words on her lips.

"Wait and see!" he cried. "I never fail when I trail a bonanza. I am willing to wait and see what the future brings, my mountain pink!"

The next moment the two horses moved off, and Flavia saw that the hand at the rein had the grip of a vise.

Before two miles had been made a man rode out of Thunder City as well mounted as the Spider and his beautiful prisoner.

This person did not possess the bronze features of the stalwart pards of the "Divide," but he was bronze and stalwart enough, and his eyes kept up a strange glitter as he moved over the road taken by Julian.

"I let him go for a future catch," the pursuer said aloud to himself. "A man like Julian the Spider is always found without much trouble. He cannot hide long. Besides, I have the major in an underground boarding-house, and when I come back I'll remove him!"

Will you, Lucifer Lynx?

Major Sphinx is no longer a tenant of the subterranean hotel.

At this moment while you ride after Julian and his prisoner, the major with his "by Jove! ha, ha!" is nearer than you think.

The daylight that peeped into a certain cabin and found Anaconda Alf keeping vigil over Gold Grit saw the Wonder-Detective still on the trail.

"Aha! look yonder!" ejaculated Julian, catching Flavia's wrist while they sat in their saddles on a part of the elevated trail, and he pointed downward where that same trail was visible for a considerable distance.

"What do you see?" he continued, smiling into the girl's face.

Flavia looked for some time, and then started slightly, a movement that caught the Spider's eye.

"You see a horseman yonder," Julian went on. "Ahl! you recognize him?"

"Yes," was the answer, and then she saw Julian's teeth meet suddenly.

"That man is after me!" he exclaimed. "That is the man whom I once threw into the Hudson, because he was on my trail. He follows me still. Lucifer Lynx can only be silenced and stopped by death. We will let him come on, Flavia. You sudden turn in the trail is within pistol-shot, and we cannot be seen from it. The New York sleuth-hound is riding straight to death, when he thinks to victory. It will take him ten minutes to show himself this side of the bend. Look! he has disappeared now, but we shall see him soon again." And as he finished, Julian drew a heavy revolver and cocked it coolly, while he seemed to follow the route of the man who was surely coming on.

Flavia appeared to count the seconds by the beating of her heart.

"Five minutes more!" suddenly ejaculated Julian. "Will you keep your eyes on the big rock at the curve, Flavia? If you don't want to witness the exit of Lucifer Lynx, you can close them, or look away."

How could she look away? Some strange magnetism kept Flavia's gaze on the rock a few paces away.

"The time is up!" spoke the desperado all at once, and Flavia saw him raise the revolver and level it at the rock!

CHAPTER XXXV.

MONTANA MAN-TIGERS.

THE pards of Thunder City were still in anxious session at Happy Hank's.

Ozark Oil had not returned with his report, and the boys were uneasy.

Some were uncharitable enough to say that the sport had backed out, and had sought other fields of adventure, and others declared that he had dropped into the clutches of the wakeful pards of Lay-out.

Lucifer Lynx had not returned, and Anaconda Alf had broken the cause of his absence to the young myth-hunter who had watched the shadows of night fall silently over the mountain camp.

Let us for the moment look after the messenger across the ridge; let us see what Ozark Oil accomplished.

There was no thought of turning back in the mind of the man who had deserted Major Sphinx when the detective had shown him up in his true character.

Ozark intended to carry the defiance to Lightning Lay-out, and to fasten it in a conspicuous place in the town.

A good horse carried him rapidly over the mountain trail, and scaling the ridge he went down on the other side.

Day had not broken over the rough landscape

when he saw around him the cabins of Thunder City's inveterate enemy and rival.

The sport reined in his horse, and left him where he could be found in a moment. Advancing on foot, Ozark stood in the heart of the camp, and the silence that fell about him was not broken by a single sound.

Ozark knew that the most important place in Lightning Lay-out was a large cabin and saloon called El Coyote.

It stood so prominently among the other cabins that it could not be missed by any visitor, and the sport from Thunder City found himself in front of it almost before he had made any effort to reach the place.

There was no moon, but the morning sky was a diamond field of stars, and Ozark advanced to the closed door of El Coyote, and with a smile he took Thunder City's manifesto from his bosom.

Spreading it against the door, he drew forth the same jack-knife which had pinned Lay-out's defiance to the stake in the Idaho town, and drove its big blade through the paper.

"Thar! I guess thet'll elevate their heads an' open their peepers!" ejaculated the bronzed messenger, stepping back and surveying his work with a grin. "You kin take thet challenge with ther compliments ov Thunder City, an' cowards ar' yer all if yer don't pick it up!"

"We'll take it up, bet yer life!" broke out a rough voice behind the Idaho sport, and before he could turn—and he had the agility of a cat—a pair of long arms went round him and he was securely pinioned.

"You got our message, eh, an' fetched a reply over?" Ozark's captor went on. "I want yer ter see ther lay-out we've got for yer skunks' nest over ther ridgel!"

And the speaker let out a yell certainly loud enough to awaken every sleeper in the mountain town.

Ozark had fallen into a trap which was not down on the bills, and when he saw more than a dozen stalwart figures bounding toward him, he fixed his teeth and resolved to keep a cool head on his shoulders.

In less time than a sentence can be penned the wild messenger stood before the pards of Lightning Lay-out with his work confronting them on the door.

Ozark looked coolly into the faces that surrounded him, and waited for the results of his trip.

In the light of bunched matches the reply on the door was read aloud amid mad ejaculations and oaths, and one-half of the party turned on Ozark like a lot of wolves.

Brass Ben had put Thunder City's defiance in language calculated to stir the Lightning Lay-out heart to its depths, and in this it had not failed.

In a little while Ozark's horse was found and brought forward, and when the doors of El Coyote were thrown open, the pards rushed in to whet their ire with the poorest whisky on the "Divide."

Lightning Lay-out did everything at once.

A few of the pards put their heads together in one corner of the saloon, and after a brief consultation Ozark was ordered to be taken to his stool.

"By Jove! are they goin' ter send me back?" mentally cried the Thunder City sport. "Mebbe they'll give me a return message. If they do I'll take it straight ter Thunder."

A moment later Ozark was approached by a giant in rough buckskin.

"Does yer hoss know ther way back?" asked the big sport.

"I reckon he could find it," was the reply.

"We'll risk 'im doin' it. You ar'—"

"Ozark Oil."

"Major Sphinx's pet, eh?"

"Not any more!" exclaimed Ozark.

"Hev yer left ther major?"

"Yes."

"By mutual agreement?"

"No."

"Is he at Thunder?"

"Not now."

"Whar is he?"

"I don't know."

It was evident that the mountain pards wanted Major Sphinx to be in Thunder City, and that Ozark's answer's made up a disappointment.

"Whar's ther young myth-hunter?"

"He is thar."

Exclamations of joy broke from the men who surrounded Ozark.

"An' ther girl?" asked some one.

Ozark nodded.

"You're ther man who checked the battle in ther mountain," continued the giant. "You forced our pards ter retire from ther attack on ther gold-tramp after he had shed Lay-out blood."

"I'm ther man," said Ozark coolly.

"What d'yer expect in return?"

What could he expect after looking into the dark faces on every side?

A grim smile formed at the corners of the Idaho sport's lips.

"You don't expect much show, eh, Ozark?" exclaimed the leader of the camp. "But," with

a smile himself, "we're goin' ter give yer more than yer deserve. Ther ropes, gents."

Ozark saw the saddle stripped from his horse, and then several long black ropes were manipulated before his eyes.

All at once he was seized by three men, and before he could resist, if resistance was his thought, his jacket was torn off, and he was lifted upon the horse, clad now in shirt and pantaloons.

Instantly a dozen men fell to work with the ropes; they were passed over his body and around the horse and drawn tight by a lot of eager hands.

Ozark said nothing, and when the work was completed, it took but a few minutes to transform him into a Mazeppa, he was lying under a net-work of ropes and securely fastened lengthwise on his steed.

The captain of the band now emerged from El Coyote with an opened knife and a piece of paper.

He was accompanied by a man whose face was covered by a hastily-constructed mask of cloth.

The piece of paper was fastened to the handle of the knife, and when near Ozark the chief thrust both into the hand of his companion.

"You are going lack ter Thunder City," cried the giant, leaning forward and looking into Ozark's face. "We'll all be thar within twenty-four hours, an' then yer skunks' den passes out o' existence. We won't be very far behind you, an' Thunder will hev a breathin'-spell between yer arrival an' ours! Silver Bill an' Dragon Dan will lead yer hoss ter ther lack trail. My friend hyer will go along an' will give yer our reply ere he leaves yer," and the Montana giant touched the shoulder of the masked man at his side.

The crowd fell back and two men seized the bridle-rein of Ozark's horse, one on each side, while the hooded sport stepped forward with the knife and paper in his hand.

Day was beginning to chase darkness from the mountains, and Ozark Oil could see the tigerish faces of the men into whose lands his adventure had thrown him.

"You'll find Thunder City all thar but ther major when you come!" he said in the way of a parting to the group that confronted him.

"All right, my Idaho seraph!" laughed the leader. "We're anxious for Thunder City ter git our last message. Take ther man away!"

The following minute Ozark's horse was led forward, and the last thing he saw was a fiendish grin on the faces left behind.

The Idaho sport was not inclined to be sullen as the day brightened; he spoke to the men who accompanied him, but they made no reply.

No halt was made until Lightning Lay-out had vanished, and then a mile lay between the halting place and the camp.

Ozark was fairly on the lack trail.

At a signal from the man in the mask, the two toughs stepped back from the horse, and the hand of the mask dropped upon Ozark's pinioned wrist.

"We say good-by byer, pard Ozark," said the man. "Ther message ter Thunder ar' tied ter this knife. You can't carry it in yer lands, tharfore we give it ter yer in yer flesh!"

Despite his situation, Ozark started.

He knew what the masked tough meant.

All at once a bronze hand threw the knife in mid air. Ozark followed it with his eye.

"Now for Thunder City!" cried the mask.

"We won't be far behind yer. Tell 'em so ef yer git thar in talkin' condition. Good-b'y, Pard Ozark!" and then down came the knife, to be followed by a wild cry of pain.

The mountain mask stepped back, leaving the heavy iron handle of the knife, with the paper attached, sticking above Ozark's head, and the two rein-holders sprung forward and struck the horse with short lengths of rope.

The animal threw up his head, quivered under the cutting blows, and with a snort of anger, went down the trail like a rocket.

The three desperados watched him until he vanished among the scrubbery, and then turned back with a laugh.

Ozark was going back to Thunder City, but with a knife in his flesh and blood on his skin!

It was the day after his departure from Thunder, and when night came again the pards assembled in Happy Hank's had heard nothing from him.

But Ozark was destined to come, as we shall see, and fated to be present at the close of our drama of the "Red Divide."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A STOLEN MARCH.

WE go back to Flavia and her captor, to the cool fellow whom we left with revolver leveled at the rock in front of which Lucifer Lynx was hable to appear at any minute.

But the seconds slipped away without bringing the Wonder-Detective before the woman and Julian the Spider bit his lip with vexation.

By and by a smile stole over Flavia's face.

"In Jove's name, where is he?" suddenly ejaculated Julian. "There is but one trail here, and that is the one we are on."

The following moment the Spider and his companion heard a voice that startled them both.

It came from a point behind their steeds and Julian turned in an instant.

"A stolen march, by Jupiter!" he exclaimed.

Firmly planted in the trail at a little elevation stood the very man for whom Julian had been waiting with finger at the trigger.

With two hands thrust forward and a revolver in each Lucifer Lynx looked triumphantly into the face of the man he had surprised.

"You've made a good run, Julian," he said as he came forward. "Your revolvers you will toss over your head into the shrubbery behind your horse. This is no child's game, and nobody knows it better than you."

The New York sport saw the look that accompanied the words, and with a sullenness that would have done a baffled tiger credit, he obeyed the command.

Five minutes later, so rapid did the spotter work, three people formed a little group where Julian had been brought to bay, and a little while afterward they rode down the trail toward Thunder City, and one of the men, a handsome fellow with a proud dark face and brilliant eyes, had his hands crossed and tied on his back.

Julian the Spider had failed to take Flavia into her bonanza kingdom, but occasional flushes told that he had not given up the game.

"Give me the shadow of a chance!" he ejaculated more than once to himself, as he gave Lucifer Lynx some black glances. "Hereafter I will go back to my old role and be Devil Jule! Then for a game that will make the 'Divide' famous forever!"

But Julian was not permitted to get free those dangerous hands of his, and whenever he glanced at Lucifer Lynx, he would catch the detective on the alert like a man who never slept.

"This is the mouth of Golden Gulch and he knows I am here!" said a man who looked like a statue in the starlight that came down between two walls of massive rock. "He promised to bring me the young man to-night; he made the promise in the cavern to which Lucifer Lynx carried me at the muzzle of his pistol. Scar Chick seems anxious to get Gold Grit away from Thunder City and I'm just as anxious to see him safe in my hands—I am, by Jove, ha, ha! Scar Chick is playing some game of his own, but I don't care what it is so long as I get my bonanza. He left me awhile last night and went down into Thunder City to see how the land lay, as he says, and he didn't come back in the best of humor; he didn't, by Jove! I've got my plans laid, anyhow. With the bonanza boy in my grip, I'll break over the Helena road, and let 'em catch the major if they can! I'm no infant if I did tumble into that New York spotter's clutches through his disguises, by Jove, no! Julian has deserted me; let him go! Ozark has gone to Lay-out to defy ther pards there. It looks like he has gone back on me, too. Well, curses on 'em all! Let Scar Chick fetch the youngster to me, and I'll beat 'em all—I will, by Jove, ha, ha!"

Major Sphinx, our old acquaintance, was carrying out his part of the compact with Scar Chick, the sport exile, and true to it, was waiting for that worthy at the mouth of Golden Gulch, a well-known place not far from Thunder City.

It was the night after the gold camp's anxious day, and while he occupied the darkened mouth of the gulch the pards at Happy Hank's were growing uneasy over Ozark's absence!

Scar Chick had not told the major that it was his stone thrown through the cabin window in an outburst of anger that had staggered Gold Grit when he was calling upon Heaven to restore the memory of his missing years.

The outlawed bully of the "Divide" had not considered it worth while to impart this information.

He knew that his villainous throw had almost taken the young myth-hunter's life, and he would not have crooked a finger to have saved it.

But as the youth still lived, Scar Chick considered it a duty to hand him over to the man who wanted him, and to do this he had brought Major Sphinx under cover of night to Golden Gulch.

The major had still a deep and desperate game to play, and he knew it.

Deserted by Julian, who had found a fortune in Flavia and her mysterious papers, and probably spurned by his old right bower, Ozark Oil, the major had to work fast in order not to be baffled by the cool-headed man who had crossed the continent for him, and for the Gotham Spider.

There was yet a chance.

With Gold Grit in his hands, he could make his escape until Lucifer Lynx should lose him or fall before the revolver of Julian, or some other foe; then, with the myth-hunter's memory restored, he could go back to the far East, help the boy into the possession of the large fortune awaiting him, and afterward swindle him out of every dollar.

It was a grand plan, and worthy of birth in the major's prolific brain.

In the mean time Scar Chick had returned to Thunder City, intending to keep his part of the compact with the major.

He did not know that Julian had made his play, and believing that Flavia still occupied the little cabin, he glided to the one tenanted by his victim of the night before.

The young gold-hunter had refused to sleep any more under Anaconda's anodynes. He stood in the door, which was open, as Scar Chick looked around the hut, and started at his first glimpse of the exiled bully.

In an instant Scar Chick was before the youth, and as Gold Grit retreated, he felt the hand of the ruffian on his shoulder. It was a moment of peril and excitement for the young man.

"I want no warnin' cry!" exclaimed Scar Chick. "You ar' alone—that is enough!" and in the lamplight the ruffian saw the bandage about the youth's forehead and showed his teeth.

"What do you want?" asked Gold Grit.

"You!" And then something glittered in Scar Chick's hand.

"You were here last night, if camp opinion is not at fault!" cried Gold Grit.

"I war, eh? What have you ter show for it?"

"My head," was the reply. "But I don't know but that I ought to thank you, Captain Scar Chick. You gave me back the missing years."

The bully of the "Divide" gave the youth a quick look, and started.

"I know all the past; your quartz boulder restored it," continued the young myth-hunter.

"I know what you tried to do some time ago. You killed Reckless Roy, and did all you could to fasten the crime on me, but your last act, brutal as it was, makes amends. I wouldn't turn you over to Thunder City if I could. I can identify the men who plundered and killed that terrible night in New York. I have lived over those events a thousand times since your boulder brought back my memory. I will face them some day! Why should I not live for vengeance?"

"Jehu!" exclaimed Scar Chick, almost releasing the young man's shoulder. "So you're actually all right at last, eh?" and he leaned forward till his bronze face almost touched the youth's white one.

"I am myself again."

"Then I guess he don't want ter see you!"

"He?—whom?" And Gold Grit broke from the bully's grip and went toward him. "What do you mean? I have a right to know some things now."

"But I'm not bound ter tell yer!" was the answer. "I guess I won't, either. I came hyer for you, Gold Grit, but I don't want yer now—not for ther purpose thet fetched my anatomy ter camp. I didn't intend ter fix yer up with my nugget last night, but fortune gave yer a lift. They don't want Scar Chick hyer, do they, boy? They'd sooner bear from Ozark jes' now—"

At that moment a loud cry from a human throat came in at the open door.

"Ozark!" ejaculated the myth-hunter.

"Mebbe him, an' mebbe not," was the reply, and Scar Chick turned and walked forward.

The gold-hunter saw him stand astride of the threshold and listen, his large figure almost filling the narrow doorway.

The yell beyond the cabin had died away, but the echoes were still alive.

All at once another cry of similar import saluted the listeners' ears, and then came a dozen revolver shots.

"Wake up, cowards ov Thunder! Ther day o' judgment hez come overland from Lightnin' Lay-out! Whoopee! Whar ar' ther skunks o' ther 'Divide'?"

"They have come!" ejaculated Gold Grit, springing to Scar Chick's side.

The exiled sport turned on him like a tiger.

"It is ther death grapple o' Thunder an' Lay-out! You want no hand in it, boy!" And Gold Grit was grasped and flung clear across the cabin with a fury that threatened to finish the work of the quartz nugget.

A moment later the figure of Scar Chick disappeared as a weird silence settled over the camp.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHICH ENDS THE GAME.

It was true that Lay-out had come to Thunder City, and true, too, that the Montana pards were not the only persons who had come.

The wild yell which had startled Scar Chick and the young myth-hunter at Lucifer's cabin had also roused the occupants of Happy Hank's mountain den.

Before the dozen revolver shots had ceased to reverberate among the spectral shanties, the saloon was thrown open, and the toughs of Thunder City rushed yelling into the starlight.

"Hyar they ar'!" cried the Montana wild men as they saw the eager response to their challenge, and in the light of the saloon lamp, which a

giant tough held fearlessly in the door of the ranch, the Idahoans saw their inveterate foes.

There came a calm as the two ranks stood face to face; it was the calm which sometimes precedes a storm.

Forty hands held as many cocked revolvers, and the two mountain tribes glared at one another like tigers; they leaned forward in their eagerness, and gave look for look with Satanic interest.

"Wal, we ar' hyar!" suddenly ejaculated the leader of the Montana pards.

"So ar' we!" was the answer.

"We've come ter wipe out ther score!"

"We ar' hyer ter wipe it out!"

It was diamond cut diamond; the rivals of the "Red Divide" were well matched.

Not far away, and unseen by either party, stood a man who, with glaring eyes and clinched teeth, awaited the opening of the battle.

If was Scar Chick.

"I reckon I don't owe any ov 'em anything!" exclaimed the outlawed. "Thunder w'uld like ter noose me for finishin' Reckless Roy, an' Lightnin' Lay-out—Jupiter! it'd like ter chaw me up! I'll wait hyar till ther scrimmage opens, an' then I'll take a hand as it suits me."

But before the sworn foes could straighten and throw up their hands for the death-grapple, the gallop of a horse was heard, and a minute later there dashed between the ranks and into the light a horse to whom a man was lashed.

The Montana sports uttered startling cries at sight of the pair.

"It is Ozark!" cried Brass Ben, of Thunder City, as he stepped toward the horse, which had halted. "This is ther way he comes back from ther liars' nest beyond ther ridge!"

"Don't touch that man!" yelled the Montana captain.

Brass Ben kept on, with an oath on his tongue.

"Hyar comes another boss!" cried some one on the Thunder City side.

Sure enough another steed appeared from toward the mountains, and the person who drew rein alongside of Ozark Oil was greeted with exclamations of wonder.

"Ther girl by all that's holy!" ejaculated Scar Chick from his place beyond the light. "If ther tribes would open on each other now, saltpetre wouldn't save that seraph!"

It was Flavia who had come upon the scene, and as if she was not aware that she sat midway between the rival camps, she leaned toward Ozark and ran a knife under his cords.

"Don't touch that man!" roared the Montana leader again.

Flavia looked up and caught his eye.

"You see I obey you, Fargo Frank," she exclaimed, and that moment the cords parted with a snap. "This looks like the final grapple between the rival camps."

"It ar' nothin' else!"

As Ozark Oil, released from the cords which had cut into his flesh since daylight, tried to straighten on the horse, Flavia slid dextrously to the ground, and gave her steed a stroke which started him forward leaving her between the armed sports.

"There shall be no blood shed here unless it be Flavia's," she cried. "The duel is not to be fought where I stand unless I open it." And the girl threw up her hand with a revolver in it.

Her words were met by silence.

"I throw up an eagle," she went on, holding up a coin in her left hand. "I will throw it so that it will fall at Fargo Frank's feet. If it falls heads, I will open the battle by shooting the man whom I elect; if it falls tails, I will walk away and shoot from the edge of light yonder. Ah! here we go!"

Flavia's lips had a smile as she prepared to execute her purpose, but ere she could do so a voice rung out from the ranks of the Thunder City crowd.

"We stand nothin' o' that sort," exclaimed Brass Ben. "Flavia has nothin' ter do with this fight. Step back, girl! This is ther hour long looked for by Thunder."

Flavia seemed to get new resolution.

"A while ago a man was found waiting for his pard at the mouth of Golden Gulch," she said.

"Jupiter Pluvius! they found ther major!" ejaculated Scar Chick.

"That man has been a citizen of Thunder City," the girl went on. "He was waiting for a person who had promised to bring him a certain man from this camp. He waits no longer, for like his old pard, Julian, he is in the hands of the man who has crossed the continent to find them both. Gentlemen of the mountains, shall I open this death-grapple as you call it? Shall I toss the golden eagle toward the stars?" and her hand was ready to throw the coin into the air.

"Oh, Jingol! let's postpone ther play!" sung out a little man at the end of the Montana line.

"What's ther use o' all this tiger lizness 'tween man an' man, anyhow? Ther's gold enough in ther 'Divide' for all—a bonanza for each man if he hunts for it."

The wild men of the Rockies looked across the space that separated the two ranks, and then into each other's faces.

It was the critical moment.

Flavia waited for the next move with bated breath.

"Hurrah for Little Link!" cried somebody. That was enough.

Suddenly one dirty sombrero spun toward the sky, then another and another, until the laced hats of Thunder City and Lightning Lay-out were mingled in the air.

Flavia stood spell-bound on the neutral ground; hats were falling all around her.

At her feet fell at the same time two sombrero's almost alike, but one had a wide silver band with little tassels, the other had a plain band of rattlesnake-skin.

The girl knew them both. All at once she stooped and picked them up, then extended them toward the rival ranks.

"Gentlemen, take your hats!" she said.

Two men, stalwart fellows with black eyes, advanced at the same time from opposite directions.

They were Fargo Frank and Brass Ben.

The bronze sports in the ranks held their breath as they looked on.

At the same moment the rival captains reached forward for their hats, but Flavia with a smile dropped them at her feet.

"You must shake first, gentlemen!" she laughed.

The next moment the two sports took another step, and two big hands, as dark as a Mexican's, met before the storm-waif!

A cheer that seemed to shake the mountain camp soared to the stars.

It was all over! the desperate feud of the "Red Divide" was no more!

Immediately there was a rush toward Happy Hank's. Flavia could not have checked it: she did not try.

For a moment longer she stood on the battleground, the only person there, and then started off.

"I guess her game is up!" ejaculated a man who drew back at her approach. "Ter-nigh I leave this camp forever. In the crowd yonder I wouldn't hev ther ghost ov a show. Ther game hez gone ag'in' me. Ther gold-tramp kin take ther prize!" And Scar Chick put up his revolver and turned his back forever upon the Idaho capital of the "Divide."

Flavia had told the truth when she said that Major Sphinx had been surprised at the mouth of Golden Gulch where he was waiting as we know for the return of Scar Chick with Gold Grit, now Jasper Jalen.

The man who had surprised him was no less a person than Lucifer Lynx, returning to Thunder City with Flavia and Julian the Spider.

Major Sphinx did not laugh now; his "by Jove! ha, ha!" was silent.

He and Julian saw that the big scheme had failed, and when they were confronted by Gold Grit they saw a new light in the youth's eyes, and were forced to hear from his lips the story of their old New York crime.

The quartz boulder thrown by Scar Chick through the cabin window had restored the missing link in memory's chain!

Within six months after the last eventful night in Thunder City several interesting events took place.

In New York two men were condemned for one of the most atrocious crimes in the history of the city, and the man who had hounded them down, Lucifer Lynx the Wonder-Detective, whispered to a young man at his side that his work was done.

A few days later a marriage ceremony was performed without any show, and Flavia proved by her half-burned papers to be the long missing heiress of a wealthy Missourian, became the wife of the myth-hunter of the "Divide."

Julian the Spider went coolly to his doom, not confessing that he it was who had killed Long Lige in order to keep the secret that he was Devil Jule; and when he died more than one crime was avenged.

Scar Chick kept his word; he came not back to Thunder City, and where he was once boss, Brass Ben holds sway.

Anaconda Alf is still an important personage among the toughs of the mountains, and Ozark, with a great scar on his bosom, is owner of the mines which once belonged to Scar Chick, the outlaw.

Ever since his startling coming home, there has been peace between the rival camps, and the men of Thunder City and Lightning Lay-out are continually shaking hands over the bloody chasm.

No more threats, no more challenges, no more manifestoes pinned to public stakes and cabin-doors!

And the man who holds Flavia's golden-haired baby in his arms and laughs at her prattle, is Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder-Detective of New York and the Rockies.

THE END.

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